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Material Meaning

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ABSTRACT

The synthesis of old and new, analog and digital, and hand- and computer-based methods provides designers with an opportunity to work beyond the constraints of the computer and take advantage of the aesthetic effects that actual materials bring to visual communication. Designers who choose to actively participate in their process – bringing the aesthetic effects of working materially into the realm of the digital – will likely learn to reject an approach that relies too heavily on passive digital tools. Active participation in the design process can extend our creative vocabulary and humanize visual communication.

INTRODUCTION

The research presented in this document is inspired by my process — exploring its exact nature, identifying its personal significance, and determining its relevance within the graphic design discipline. I discovered that my process stems from a fascination with integrating type and image, an appreciation for materials and technology, and the desire to make type come alive in my hands.

I question the contemporary process of graphic design, where the majority of work begins and ends on the computer. Digital tools are deeply embedded in the contemporary design process, but are not the only (or the best) tools at our disposal.

Designers can use physical materials and processes as a way of both forming and informing visual communication. Materials have the power to communicate ideas through their aesthetic qualities, even when words are not present. When the connotation of a word and the associations inherent in a material intersect, communication can be exponentially amplified.

Digital tools open up and overcome the limits of physical materials, allowing their imperfections to enter the design process, and providing designers with a means of abstracting and reproducing their physical properties. When we filter materiality through digital technology into applied graphic design, we control and edit the aesthetic effects of material traces. We are able to obscure the literal sense of a material while holding on to its essence, mark-making qualities, and associations. The resulting forms display a dynamic contrast — the precise contrasting the organic, the illusion of materiality in a reproducible, two-dimensional surface, and an honesty in image-making, which differs from most software-generated design created today.

BACKGROUND

I was born in 1985 — the year the world was introduced to the first autofocus single-lens reflex camera and Nintendo. My generation grew up with the explosion of digital technology. When I entered grade school in 1991, computers were used by a selective group of people and were not available in the public schools of Iowa City. Less than ten years later, I was using computers at home and at school. CDs and DVDs were commonplace, and AOL Instant Messenger was the apex of my social network. When I began college in 2003, Facebook did not exist. By the time I graduated in 2007, it was the way everyone I knew communicated.

Growing up with this drastic transformation infused my generation with a unique perspective. I remember what it was like before cell phones existed and before the internet was accessible to everyone, so I never take these technologies for granted. At the same time, I spent so much of my malleable youth surrounded by new technology that it is part of who I am and how I understand the world. To me, digital technology is simultaneously awe-inspiring and completely ordinary. Technology is a part of my life, but does not pervade every aspect of it. This attitude permeates my personal connections and relationships, and my work as a designer. I view digital technology as part of a network of processes that includes many other tools.

My generational context, coupled with an education that emphasized the role of the hand in the design process, led me to become the designer I am today. At Rhode Island School of Design, I was taught to work with physical tools and materials such as scissors, paper, wood, and glue. In typography classes, I drew letterforms in pencil and painted them with velvety black gouache. At the same time I was getting ink on my hands, I was toting around my brand-new Macbook loaded with Adobe Creative Suite. RISD did not provide formal software training. Instead, I learned to use the technology mostly on my own through trial and error and the occasional tutorial book. As I explored these analog and digital tools in tandem, I fell in love with both realms, and the two methods of working became significantly interdependent in my process.

I attended RISD on an impulse, a gut feeling that I decided to trust. Luckily my scientist parents supported this decision, and I am grateful to them. Growing up with chemists for parents, my questions about the world were answered in terms of molecules and atoms. As a child, I imagined the chemical elements to be actual three-dimensional letterforms. I’ve carried this thought with me into my adult life. When I dive into a swimming pool, I still visualize myself jumping into a pool full of hydrogen and oxygen atoms. I imagine the *Hs* and *Os* separating as I dive through them, and joining back together behind the trail of my kick. I view the alphabet as a finite set of components capable of infinite possibilities, similar to the chemical elements that are the fundamental units of the world. To me, letters are living, breathing things that literally make up the world we live in. I do not see a huge difference between my father experimenting with molecules to discover new catalysts, and myself experimenting with type and image to discover new ways to communicate ideas. A hypothesis, a guess, an idea, is an entry point to discovery. I see these connections clearly now, as the forces that have led me to my research interests.

1

MATERIAL MEANING: USING PHYSICAL MATERIALS
TO FORM AND INFORM VISUAL COMMUNICATION

State of the art

Most design projects begin and end on the computer. Our hands are rarely used to operate tools that are not attached to a USB cord. Digital tools are firmly embedded in the contemporary design process, but are not the only (or the best) tools at our disposal. The synthesis of old and new, analog and digital, and hand- and computer-based methods provides designers with an opportunity to work beyond the constraints of the computer and take advantage of the aesthetic effects that actual materials bring to visual communication.

When designers are guided by digital tools, all the work looks more or less the same. We need only glance at a site like *trendlist.org* to see that design trends are regurgitated repeatedly in predictable patterns, directly tied to the current versions of our software. The programs used in design are immediately identifiable. There is no mystery in what we see – vector drawings and digital photo filters are revealed at first glimpse. Design solutions are at hand – embedded, latent, and resting in ubiquitous aluminum boxes. We compartmentalize ourselves, both by the tools we use and by their relationship to design application. We are logo designers (Illustrator), book designers (InDesign), web designers (Photoshop), and so on.

When designers inject a non-digital material or process into their digital workflow, there is less overlap in the results. By incorporating materials – going back to our hands and bringing analog processes into the computer – we can increase our capacity to imagine as designers, and as a result, increase our audience’s capacity to imagine as well. Striving for more spontaneity, surprise, and enjoyment in our process leads us to more interesting, engaging design – design that is original and inventive, design that feels alive and emotional.

Type as material

Letterforms and words are the essence of graphic design, and in present-day practice we are lucky to have the ease and freedom to work with type digitally. The computer is an incredible and necessary tool for efficiency, reproduction, and perfection. But why must efficiency, reproduction, and perfection be the values we strive for as designers? Consider an alternative point of view: what if we slow down and think about type as physical matter, not just pixels? Words are capable of being material artifacts. Design can be a process of rigorous construction, not simply pixel pushing.

Many artists take this approach. For example, the painter Ed Ruscha talks about words as objects. He says sometimes he doesn’t know if he is “painting pictures of words, or painting pictures with words.” (1) Jasper Johns draws the numeral 2 out of charcoal, as if he were drawing a sumptuous nude. For both artists, letterforms are the subject matter of their work. Rather than applying type to an image, they create their images out of type. This crossover – both words as material object, and words as content – has powerful implications for visual communication.

When designers embrace the materiality of words and consider type as physical matter, both instead of and in conjunction with pixels, new possibilities abound. Words are plastic and workable. Type can be malleable, like paint or clay.



Ed Ruscha, *Rancho*, 1968. (2)



Jasper Johns, *Ten Numbers: Figure 2*, 1960. (3)

1 “Pacific Standard Time: Anthony Kiedis Celebrates Ed Ruscha.” *YouTube*. 2011. 0:17. Web.
2 Marshall, Richard and Edward Ruscha. *Ed Ruscha*. New York: Phaidon Press, 2003. 54, 125. Print.
3 Johns, Jasper. “Ten Numbers: Figure 2.” *The Cleveland Museum of Art*. Web.

When we think about letterforms and words as physical materials, we are faced with the integration of type and image. Anything can become an image, and anything can become type. On one hand this is overwhelming, on the other it is completely liberating. We are not tied to the typefaces in our font library or the generic images available on stock photo websites. We can borrow image-making tools from any and all disciplines and re-purpose them for graphic design using crossover tools like digital cameras and scanners.

For example, I use traditionally non-graphic-design means to make images, and then reintroduce them in my work. I am interested in the tension present when type is handmade, but has not lost its identity as a specific typeface. The following spread illustrates a step-by-step example of one of my processes. I sent a digital file to a laser cutter to produce acrylic letterforms, then made rubber molds of those letterforms, cast concrete into the molds, and carefully grafted multiple letters while the concrete was setting. This sculptural typographic construction was then photographed, combined with digitally set type, and cropped to become a poster. My process went from digital to analog and back again.

Unpredictable image-making processes can be far more interesting than processes that rely on the premeditated results associated with digital tools. This unpredictable quality is most evident in processes involving the hands, where the designer relies on the computer as a complementary tool. I am most intrigued by designers who move back and forth, from analog to digital, attempting to fuse the two together. Digital tools should be considered as one of many possible tools in a network of processes – not the only option from the beginning to end, and certainly not a shortcut.

For example, the designer Martin Venezky is “exploring how the process of design can be about something other than simply interacting with a computer ... the practice of design can still be hands-on and physical, no matter what new technologies may be placed at one’s disposal.” (4) In this printed guide for Sundance Film Festival, he uses photography and scanning to synthesize numerous materials that he and his design team have altered by hand, into a digital, reproducible layout.

Aesthetic effects of materials

Designing this way – synthesizing the hand and the computer, analog and digital processes – leads to engaging design because there are aesthetic effects to working materially. Materials have the power to communicate ideas through their visual qualities, even when words are not present. Materials can also evoke ideas without being illustrations. When the connotation of a word and the associations inherent in a material intersect, communication can be exponentially amplified. Meaning can be enhanced, specified, or obscured. Type and image, words and materials mutually reinforce each other. There is a synergy between word and material because words are “centers of visual energy.” (5) This interplay between verbal and visual communication is controlled by the designer.

Designers can use physical materials and processes as a way of both forming and informing visual communication. For example, in the study pictured at left, the word *stasis* is contradicted by the material and process with which it was created. The word was formed by my body’s motion of pulling inked rubber stamps across a rough paper. This highly visual, kinetic sense enhances the meaning of the word *stasis* by contradicting it. The juxtaposition of the word with the visual of motion both forms the word *stasis* that we read, and informs the meaning of the word *stasis* that we sense. The syntactic and semantic aspects of the piece intersect.



Martin Venezky, *Sundance Film Festival Film Guide*, 2001. (4)



Anne Jordan, *Stasis/Motion*, from the series *Holden Caulfield Folio*, 2011. (6)

4 Venezky, Martin. *It Is Beautiful – Then Gone*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005. 25, 33, 87, 191. Print.
5 Solt, Mary Ellen and Willis Barnstone. *Concrete Poetry: a World View*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969. 61, 79. Print.
6 Jordan, Anne. “Holden Caulfield Folio.” Anne Jordan: MFA Archive. Web.



Anne Jordan, *Catch*, from the series *Holden Caulfield Folio*, 2011. (6)



Ed Ruscha, *Evil*, 1973. (2)



Méret Oppenheim, *Fur Covered Tea Cup, Saucer, and Spoon*, 1936. (7)

Ed Ruscha's painting, *Evil*, becomes even more powerful when the viewer realizes that the work was created using blood on satin. Blood not only forms the strokes of the letterforms E-V-I-L, but also informs the viewer's interpretation of the word *evil*. Materials have a powerful psychological effect, especially when we see them used in ways they are not usually intended. Materials have the capability to define and redefine objects — they determine how we distinguish books, posters, and typography. Manipulating materials gives designers an opportunity to challenge and depart from traditional definitions and understandings of graphic design.

This psychological power is nothing new, but is often overlooked in contemporary graphic design. The Surrealists and Dadaists were exploring materials long before the advent of the computer. Méret Oppenheim's *Fur Covered Tea Cup, Saucer, and Spoon* transforms mundane objects into “sensuous, sexually punning tableware.” (7) Kurt Schwitters' collages combine all conceivable materials, including trash, into pieces of graphic art. László Moholy-Nagy's photograms employ light and photo-sensitive material to elevate everyday objects in highly abstract, two-dimensional form. Unfortunately it seems that many designers today, when confronted with the computer, disregard this other world of possibility.

Purely digital design is essentially non-sensory. Cold and flat, it lacks the evocation of rich emotion that real, physical materials can call forth. Materials, on the other hand, appeal to our senses. The evocation of senses and associations inherent in a material or process can be used to reinforce a message. Words encapsulate meaning and materials encapsulate meaning. Together they produce messages that are even stronger, more specific, more expressive, and more human. In a painting, for example, material and image work together. The method of mark-making, the brush strokes, are very close to the artist. When viewing a painting, we are close to the maker, and we imagine the feeling of holding that brush in our own hands.

We sense textures, scents, and dimensions even when we are viewing a reproduction (such as a photograph). Faking real materials digitally is very difficult to achieve, and even when done well maintains a cold, computer-generated feel because of its perfection. We are not fooled into believing an animated film by Pixar is real, for example. Despite the incredible level of technical prowess such films display, they clearly evoke a feeling of distance and otherness. There is a meaningful difference between faking the effects of a material digitally, and using the effects of real materials in the creation of visual work.

Designer and educator Mitch Goldstein often tells the story, “on more than one occasion I have been asked by a student how to make a simple physical effect digitally. ‘How can I make a coffee cup ring stain on a piece of paper with Photoshop?’ My answer? ‘Get a cup of coffee, a piece of paper, and a scanner.’” Goldstein writes, “the tools we have available to us are nothing short of magnificent, but it comes with a caveat: when it is so easy to make anything, it is too easy to make nothing good. The authenticity of how we make, how we create meaning and engagement becomes more and more important as the skills to do so get more and more muddled inside of the tools.” (8)

The computer is just one of many tools for expression. When we synthesize old and new, analog and digital, and hand- and computer-based methods we significantly increase our capacity to communicate. We can add more words to our design vocabulary, using visual language to be more specific in our verbal language.

7 “The Collection: Méret Oppenheim.” MOMA: The Museum of Modern Art. Web.
8 Goldstein, Mitch. “The Color of Laziness.” Mitch Goldstein: MFA Archive. Web.

Making as thinking

It is an essential human desire to work with our hands, to make real things. This desire has always been with us, but is even more important in response to the digital age. Making with our hands is not just a method of working, it is a way of thinking and a path to discovery. The designer Otl Aicher writes, “making gives us a point of view ... the hand’s plasticity is the plasticity of thought. If the hand can open up, then the mind will open up more freely as well.” (9)

Using physical materials allows designers to not only think, but to feel again, too. Our careers (and lives) are consumed by digital experiences. We don’t touch and feel real things anymore — we experience through simulation instead. We mimic the look of paint splatters in our photo manipulation program rather than getting our hands dirty with actual paint. It’s faster and cleaner, and we don’t have to get up from our desks. In contrast, making by hand puts us “in touch with duration and offers an antidote to our cultural obsession with the immediate, the instant.” (10) Employing analog methods makes us aware of the passing of time, the pull of gravity, and the sense of being alive. Why would we ever want to lose touch with this feeling?

There is a difference between being a designer and being a maker. One can be both, of course, but more often than not we are one or the other. We design something in the vacuum of the computer and send it off to be made by a machine. The artist Louise Bourgeois said, “I am not what I am. I am what I make with my hands.” (11) In my opinion, the most interesting designers lean toward this mentality, embodying the spirit of both designers and makers, identifying themselves with what they create.

Using one’s hands and eclectic, wide-ranging, non-digital tools and processes opens avenues for increased innovation and invention in image-making. I didn’t know what would happen when I pulled a concrete letterform out of a rubber mold and photographed it, for example. The imperfection in making things with the hands frees designers from the perfection in the computer, from the lack of surprise. When working with our hands, we are not expected to snap to a grid or align each pixel perfectly. We experience a freedom that is absent when working on the computer, where each decision must be pre-thought.

The nature of digital tools is that they are far more explicitly prescribed than analog tools, which have more affordances. Martin Venezky writes, “it is telling that the cheapest design tool — the pencil — is the hardest to master. Every mark is a decision determined by a body and relates to every other mark in a physical way.” (4) Computers and digital design programs are no longer new and mysterious — they are just a few of the many tools in our toolbox, as valuable as a pair of scissors or a pencil. We must know when to embrace digital tools and when to ignore them. The computer does some things extremely well — perfection, organization, clean-cut designs. Spontaneity and materiality is generally absent.

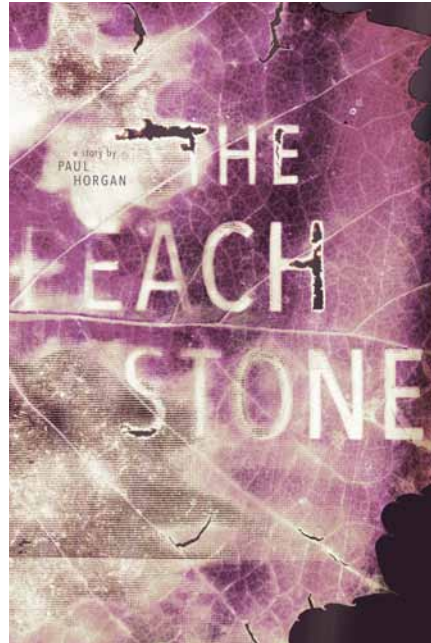
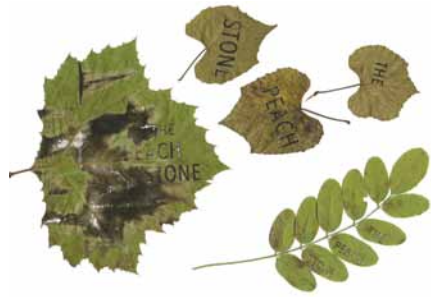
Appropriating tools from outside graphic design, or constructing tools in order to construct design, even inventing one’s own tools, are ways for designers to discover new things. Tools and habits go together, after all — every tool builds a memory in the way it is used. Changing tools means changing habits, and opening up a universe of new visual languages.

Materials have the same effect as tools, so there is a benefit to exploring many. Tools have certain affordances. So, too, do materials. Questioning the normal mode of use of materials and employing them in unconventional ways leads to discovery. Remixing materials, design elements, and forms — finding unusual combinations — leads to interesting and engaging visual communication.

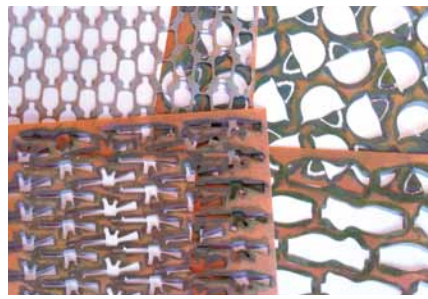
9 Aicher, Otl. “Grasping with the Hand and Mind.” *Analogous and Digital*. Berlin: Ernst & Sohn. 1994. 20. Print.

10 Abrams, Janet. “Craft: A Return to the Hand.” *Metropolis Magazine*. April 2011. Print.

11 “Identity.” *Art21: Art in the Twenty-First Century*. Public Broadcasting Service, 2001. Television.



Anne Jordan and Meaghan Dee,
The Peach Stone, 2010. (12)



Anne Jordan, *The Things They Carried*, 2010. (12)

The two book covers pictured on the opposite page are examples of remixing materials and tools in new ways. In *The Peach Stone*, typography was laser cut into a dried leaf, using the element of fire itself to form the title so the words emerge organically. The leaf was then scanned and the color digitally manipulated. These choices reveal a sense of the story, which is about a young girl who dies when a pile of dried leaves catches fire. In *The Things They Carried*, I borrowed a tool from painting and print-making – Japanese stencil paper – but used it as if it were a film negative. Light shines through the layers of stencil paper in an irregular way, creating an image that is reminiscent of camouflage and jungle. This aesthetic effect is relevant to the story that unfolds within the book, which is about soldiers in the Vietnam war and the significance of their possessions.

While getting away from the computer and working with materials opens up many possibilities, this approach can also constrain and point the designer to certain types of forms. Designers can use materials as a way of setting up restrictions and possibilities, a way to limit form-making while at the same time exploring experimental processes for aesthetic effects. In addition to enhancing communication, materials are means to other ends: form-making, image-making, discovery, and enjoyment.

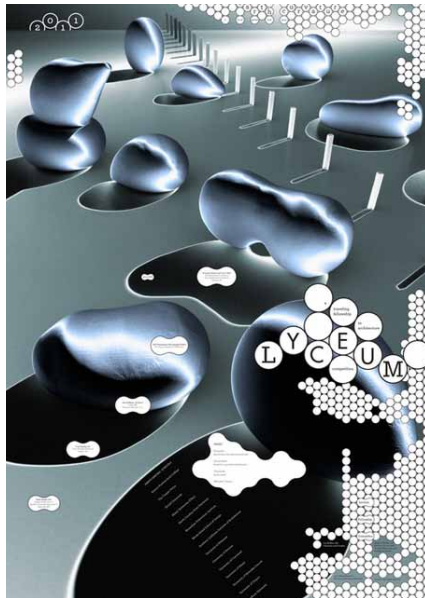
Importance of synthesis

In light of my arguments for the importance of analog processes and materiality, it is important to acknowledge that designers can't just make purely handmade things and abandon the computer altogether. Computers do wonderful things that humans cannot (laser cutting, for example). Plus, designers have a responsibility to conform to expectations of their clients with respect to reproduction and budget limitations. We must combine our analog work with digital tools, and search for the ideal synthesis. Combining analog and digital gives designers an even greater degree of control over the aesthetic effects of physical materials. The honesty and authenticity of materials in tandem with digital tools provides infinite possibilities for interpretive meaning.

When synthesizing analog and digital, the designer is in control of the aesthetic effects of materials to a very fine degree. Translating a material object into reproducible, digital form through photography, scanning, or other methods lets the designer pick and choose the aesthetic effects she wants to keep. She can change the color, the scale, and layering with other images. These changes have the potential to take the original material away from itself, making it less self-conscious, and yielding to the message of the piece.

Materials can be explored and evoked on a sliding scale, from the clear and obvious to the very abstract. Even at the point of extreme abstraction, representations of material maintain certain echoes and traces of their origins. This trace of materiality becomes part of the aesthetic, and therefore part of the visual communication. The material can play a significant role in the final piece, or it can have almost disappeared – but even the smallest trace is significant to the viewer's unconscious understanding. All materials have residue, it is up to the designer how much or little to wipe away. Digital tools give us the ability to control this residue.

There is a threshold where the identity of a material shifts, and starts to transcend its self-reference. The simple transformation of representing a three-dimensional material in a two-dimensional photograph can be enough for a material to become abstracted. When a material loses its obvious identity, it still carries echoes of the aesthetic qualities inherent in that material. At this point, the material yields to communication. Just as vector drawings and Photoshop filters can be too obvious,



Skolos + Wedell, *Lyceum Competition Poster*, 2011. (13)

so, too, can physical materials. When the viewer is not distracted by the material and can instead soak up the aesthetic qualities that the material brings to visual communication, even on an unconscious level, there is a sweet spot of analog and digital synthesis.

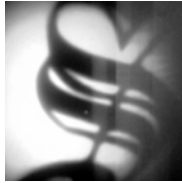
For example, the design team Skolos + Wedell build three-dimensional sets using materials such as wood, glass, plaster, and paper to create dynamic posters. The sets are built to be lit and photographed – the final piece is the photograph in the form of a reproduced poster, not the physical set itself. The physical set is a means to an end, a way to create an illusion of material in a rich image. Often, lighting and camera angle are used to distort scale so that the materials take on an otherworldly quality. In *Lyceum Competition Poster*, small plaster forms become enormous boulders existing in a completely hand-built landscape. Combining the image with digitally-set type further emphasizes this change in scale.

The ability to manipulate color and opacity, too, is a wonderful freedom that digital tools lend to material-based images. For example, my material exploration of the words *mummy* and *memory* (pictured on pages 36–43) are created from layers of simple cardboard cut with a blade. The incision marks, layering, roughness, and missing pieces support the semantic concept. The original board pieces are only the first step. Once photographed, I used digital tools to change the scale and adjust the color, which made the obvious and literal presence of cardboard disappear. What remains is the texture of the incision marks, the layered quality, and the roughness of the edges. Layering multiple, transparent images of the boards exaggerated the communication, and moved the image further away from the literal board material.

Digital tools open up and overcome the limits of physical materials, allowing their imperfections to enter the design process, and providing designers with a means of abstracting and reproducing their physical properties. When we filter materiality through digital technology into applied graphic design, we control and edit the aesthetic effects of material traces. We are able to obscure the literal sense of a material while holding on to its essence, mark-making qualities, and associations. The resulting forms display a dynamic contrast – the precise contrasting the organic, the illusion of materiality in a reproducible, two-dimensional surface, and an honesty in image-making, which differs from most software-generated design created today. This is the next frontier in graphic design – now that the computer is no longer new and shiny, we can look to both the past and to the future and explore how old and new ways of working influence each other.

Relevance

The synthesis of analog and digital ways of working is relevant to all designers today. It is a way to hold on to the real world, by staying connected to real images made from real materials. The knowledge of this honesty, this authenticity, this evocation of materiality, has value to both designers and their audience. We are so often confronted by the soulless, dishonest ‘materiality’ in purely computer-generated design. On the opposite extreme, purely handmade work is often excessive or sentimental, relying on cliché devices of materials to achieve a desired effect. We can all appreciate that design born from physical materials and constructed using an element of the human hand are often more alive than purely digital results. We have to balance ourselves between the allure of the computer and that of the physical world.



Top: John Sawyer, Pigeon Lige Lu, Samantha Wittwer
Bottom: Jiyoona Cha, Gwen Stinger, Noelle Choy
One Hundred Letters, 2011. (14)

Not only is this beneficial to designers and their audience, but to design education as well. Expanding the degree to which students are free to explore is paramount. As new technologies emerge, it is critical to frequently remind students that their most important tools are their hands, minds, and hearts. The dialog between the hand and the mind — our thoughts executed through our hands, and our hands informing our thoughts — must not be overshadowed by a technocentric curriculum. The best designers have deep and varied toolboxes at their disposal — toolboxes that are stamped with other marks than *Apple*.

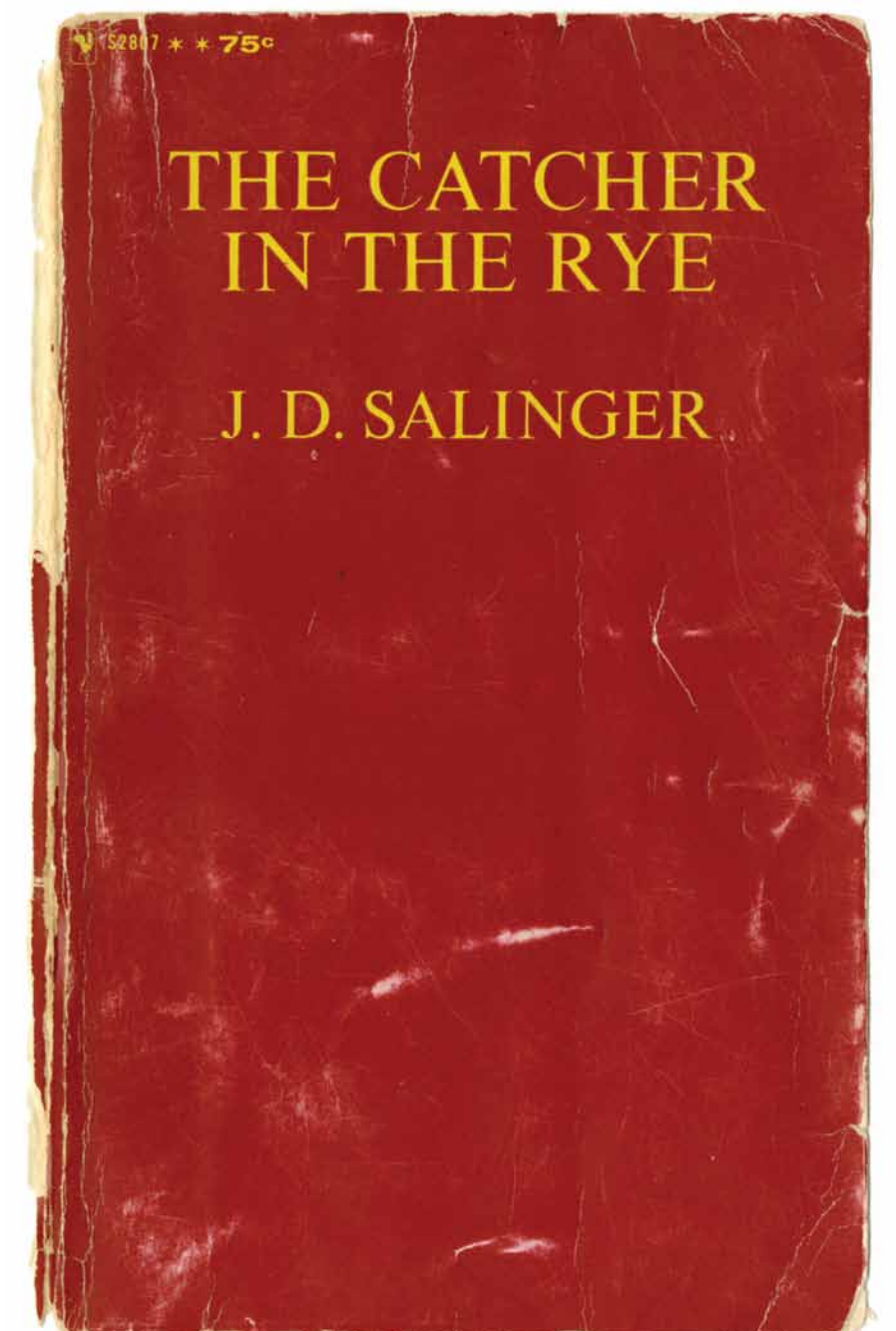
For example, in an introductory typography class in the Department of Graphic Design at Virginia Commonwealth University, I asked my students to make one hundred different versions of a letter, using their hands, and a variety of analog processes and physical materials. (14) These images were then brought back into the computer, adjusted, combined, or integrated with digitally set type. This is an eye-opening assignment for sophomore students, many have never considered that type can be made outside of the computer.

Conclusion

This thesis promotes a method of working that involves the human body and senses, as a response to the digital media that overwhelms our culture today. Designers should encourage themselves — and their students — to swim against this tide, questioning and resisting the passivity of digital tools.

Working this way allows designers to be more involved in their own processes, to generate more interesting and engaging design, and to touch the emotions of their audience at a more human level. Designers who choose to actively participate in their process — bringing the aesthetic effects of working materially into the realm of the digital — will likely learn to reject an approach that relies too heavily on passive digital tools. Active participation in the design process can extend our creative vocabulary and humanize visual communication. Ultimately, analog and digital synthesis is beneficial to the end product of visual communication.

2



HOLDEN CAULFIELD FOLIO

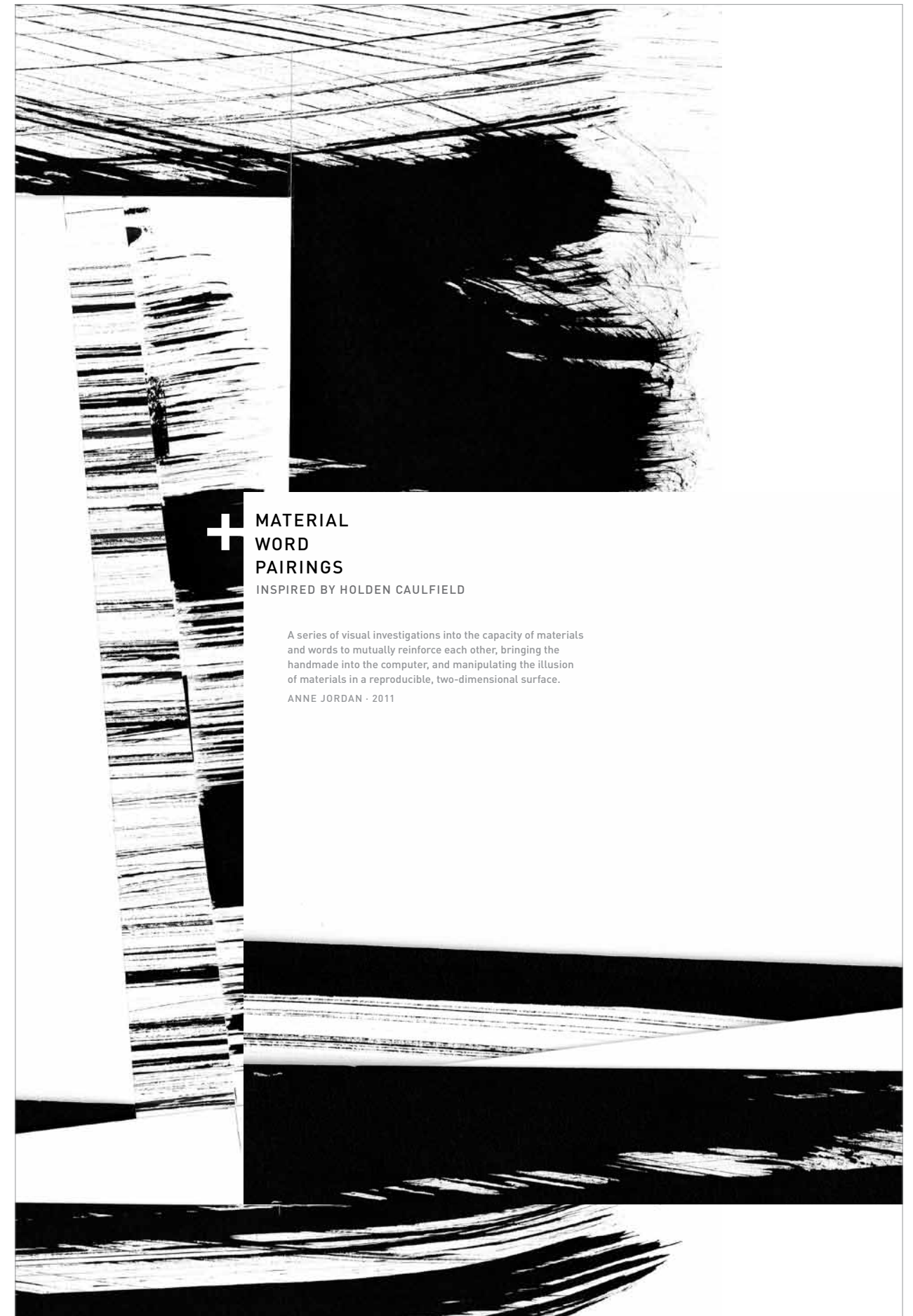
This folio of prints is the result of a series of visual investigations exploring my interpretation of the book *The Catcher in the Rye*. There are a number of important words in the book that encapsulate overarching themes of the story, such as *mummy* and *memory*, *catch* and *meet*, and *Holden* and *hold on*. I used these words as the basis of typographic studies exploring a range of physical materials and processes. I chose materials carefully in order to mix words from the text with materials that reinforced the concepts attached to the words, creating very specific intersections between the two. The materials both form and inform the words, exponentially amplifying their connotations.

Holden Caulfield Folio consists of sixteen, 12 x 18-inch prints. Each print is the result of a rigorous exploration, emphasizing analog processes and tools. Some methods included using clay to form letters, mixing and pouring free-form plaster, molding rubber, casting concrete, folding paper, and using a knife to draw on cardboard. Handmade objects were imported to the computer through scanning and photography and then images were digitally manipulated. This switch from analog to digital flattened the work into two dimensions and made it possible to reproduce the results. Digital tools expanded and exceeded the physical limitations of materials (such as color, transparency, and scale).

The prints are held inside a folio constructed of two concrete slabs, with screws seamlessly embedded in the base, and four small holes drilled in the cover for wing nuts to open and close. The initials *HC* were cast in a contrasting shade of concrete and embedded in the cover. The folio is a real, material object with a smell and texture that echoes the illusion of materiality represented in the prints inside (some of which are photographs of concrete letterforms).

This work expresses my personal interpretation of the book, the qualities that Holden Caulfield embodies, and his experience as a teenager struggling to become an adult. The goal is to permeate typography with Holden's feelings and emotions, and to make the letterforms come alive with his spirit through my hands.





**MATERIAL
WORD
PAIRINGS**

INSPIRED BY HOLDEN CAULFIELD

A series of visual investigations into the capacity of materials and words to mutually reinforce each other, bringing the handmade into the computer, and manipulating the illusion of materials in a reproducible, two-dimensional surface.

ANNE JORDAN · 2011

HOLDEN • HOLD ON

Holden is caught in the movement of time passing, struggling to hold on to his youth as he is faced with increasingly adult experiences. His perspective of age, and sense of himself, changes moment by moment. More than anything, he wants to be able to hold on to something stable, to escape aging's whirling forces.



A single piece of folded paper becomes a visual translation of Holden's struggle, twirling in space and time to reveal the words *Holden* and *hold on*. The same piece, from four different views, communicates different slivers of the message. Paper can simultaneously be two- and three-dimensional, allowing flat, printed words to take on volume and movement, resembling a body twirling in circles. This form also references a scene at the end of the book, which takes place on a carousel – the action or inaction of going around in circles is an important metaphor throughout the book.



HOLDEN, HOLD ON, HOLDEN, HOLD ON, HOLDEN, HOLD ON...

MUMMY • MEMORY

The entire book is Holden telling stories from his recent and distant memory. He is in a mental institution in California, narrating three days of his life when he was on his own in New York City. This narrative is intertwined with memories from previous years. *Mummy* and *memory* are symbolically related in the story – Holden visits a museum that houses mummies while he is in New York. “Memory functions like a mummy cloth,” a form of protection that wraps around oneself, others, or moments, attempting to stop time. (Salzman, 47) Memory is multi-layered. It is a form of preservation, yet organically deteriorates and rots. I am using various visual languages born from materials to communicate this idea of layering, preservation, and wrapping.

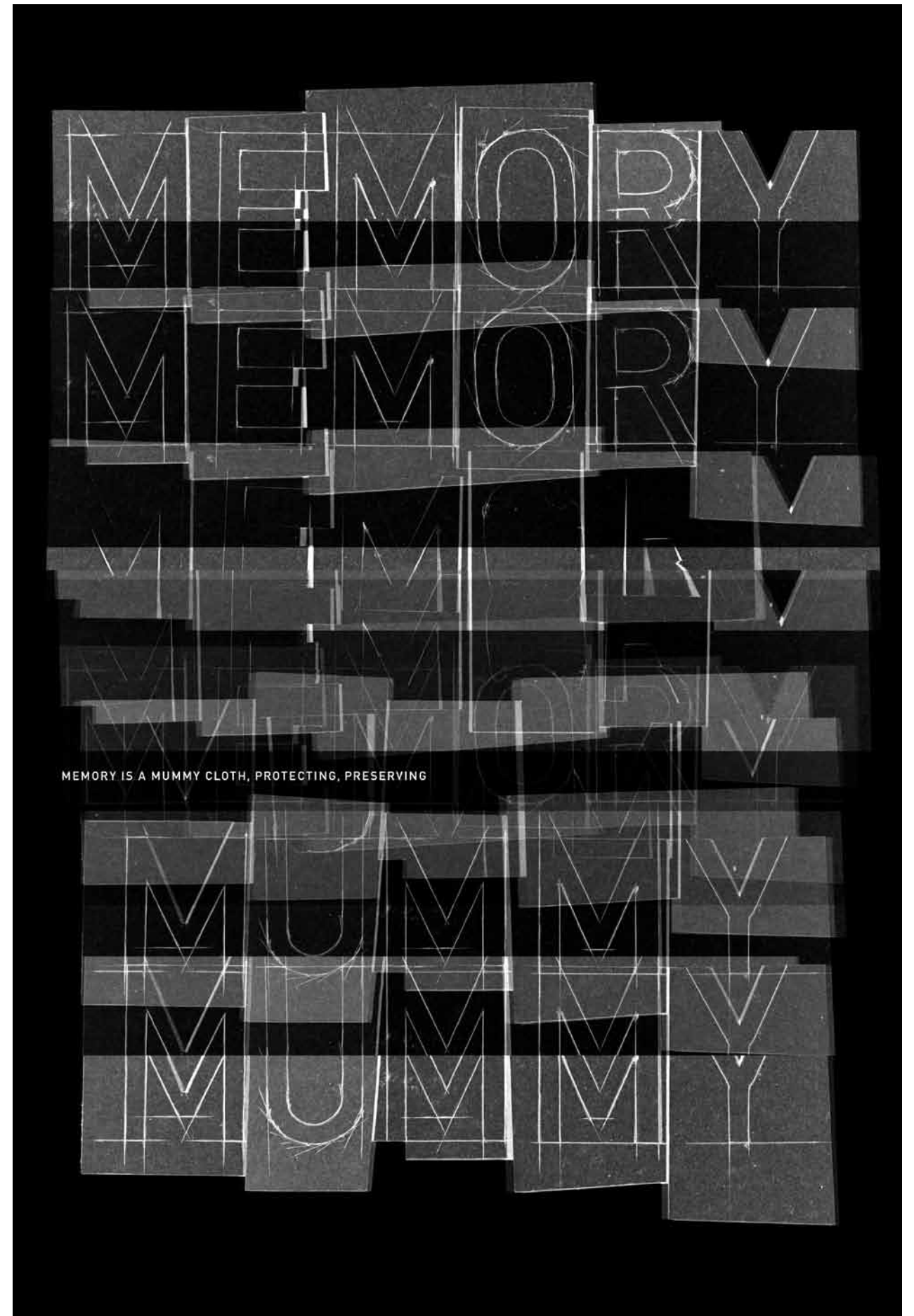


Memory and *mummy* were incised into pieces of board, and layered on top of each other.

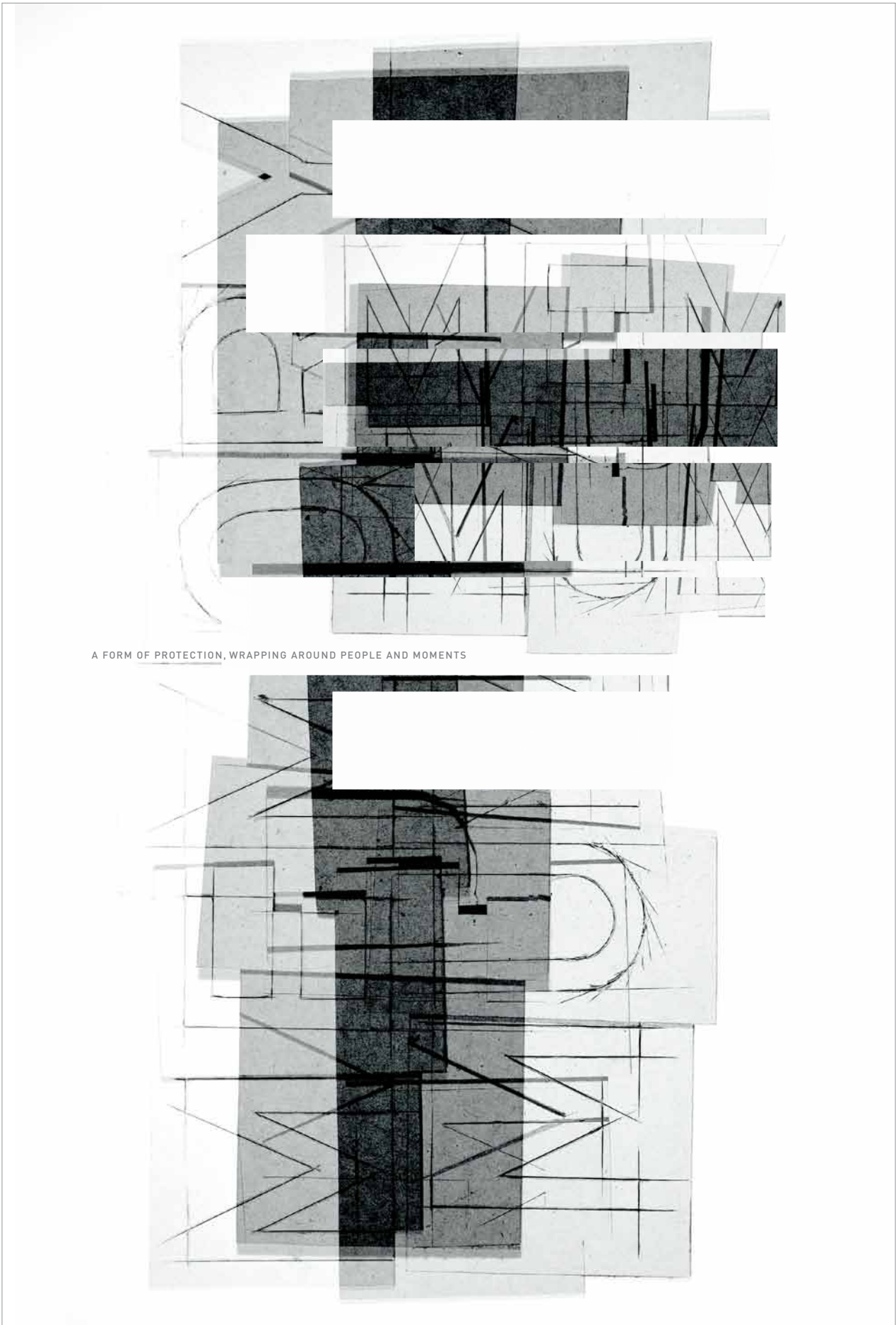
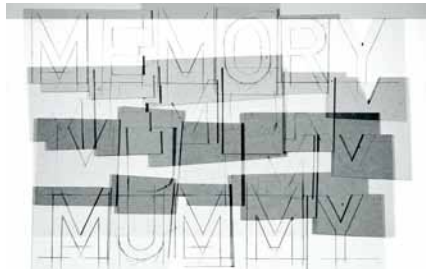
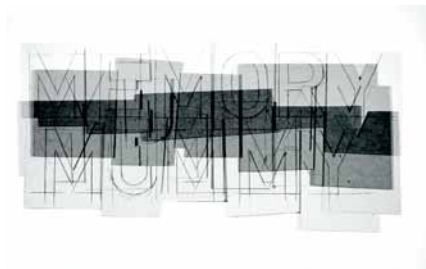


Words were photographed from the front and back, creating a transition between legible and illegible. This transition communicates the fading, deteriorating qualities of *memory* and *mummy*.

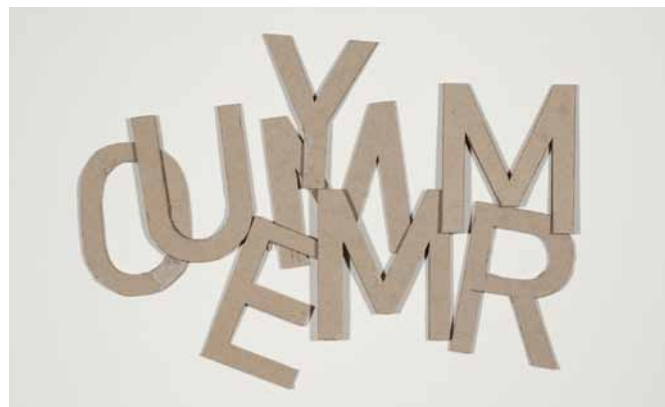
Opposite: Changing the color takes the material away from board, makes it less self-conscious and yields itself to the word's meanings.



Incision marks, layering, roughness, and missing pieces support the visual concept of mummification. Layering multiple shots on top of each other emphasizes the mummy quality, and moves the image farther away from the literal board material, using the aesthetic effects of the board without the distraction of being recognizable. I went through variations of this – exploring levels of density, variations of *memory* and *mummy* fading in and out of each other, and very stark color change. The layers of images become a cloth draping over the letterforms, covering the words, the way that memory “wraps around people and moments,” stopping and mummifying time. (Salzman, 47)

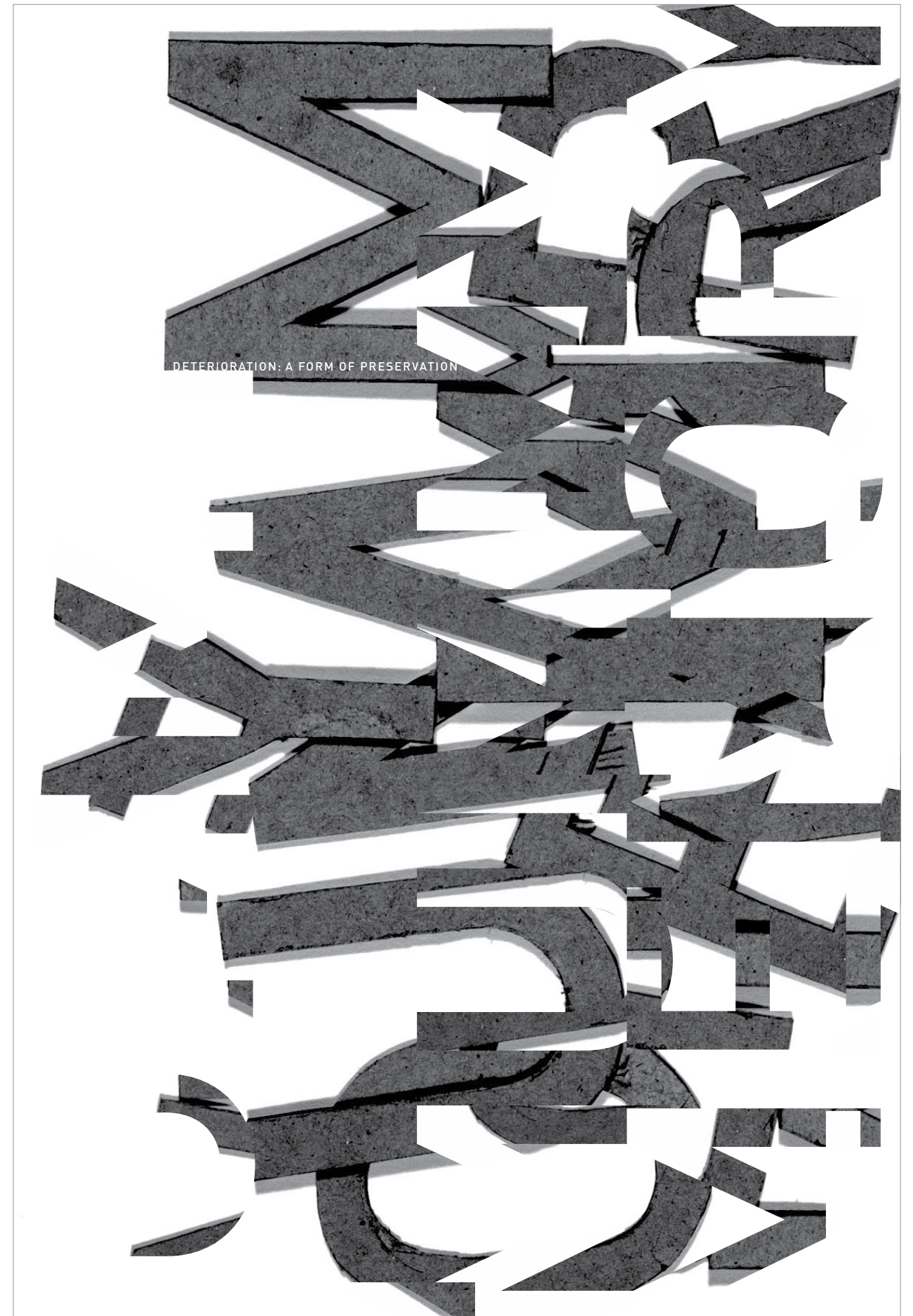


A FORM OF PROTECTION, WRAPPING AROUND PEOPLE AND MOMENTS



The mummy/memory studies began with this simple set of cut cardboard letterforms. I really enjoy the typographic feel and consistency of them. The typography is handmade, but not messy. The letterforms maintain a sense of order and cleanliness. I like the mix of rough material contrasting crisp typographic form.

The letterforms are all based on DIN Medium. I love the typeface DIN because it has a neutral flavor that can take on any intended material or meaning. Its neutrality affords enormous flexibility in communicating, especially when it is mixed with real materials and constructed in three dimensions. DIN is not self-conscious, it is able to take on the flavor of any material in which it lives.

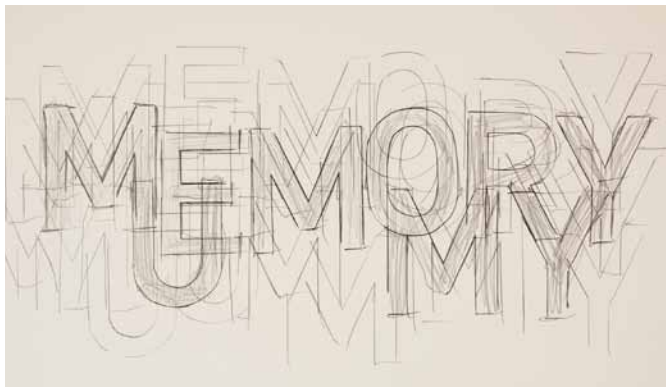


Cropping images within digital outlines of letters further emphasizes the layering action. A feeling of depth is created as letterforms recede into the distance, intersecting the typography. Crispness coupled with the rough quality of the cardboard communicates the idea of deteriorating memory as it is attempted to be preserved.





This investigation uses the cardboard letters as stencils. Layers of pencil lines wrap themselves around the negative space forming letterforms, another mummy-like action. The implicit process and treatment of material communicates the meaning of the words *mummy* and *memory*.



The rubber mold contains a void, mummy-like cavity. The memory of the acrylic letterform it was made from is entombed in the mold. Layering the same photograph over itself many times creates a similar visual wrapping effect as the cardboard, but with different aesthetic cues. There is more depth and moodiness in this image – connoting shifting memory and the passage of time, distinct from mummification. Digital tools allow me to move away from the literal material of the mold, while holding onto the dimension, light, and shadows that it provides.



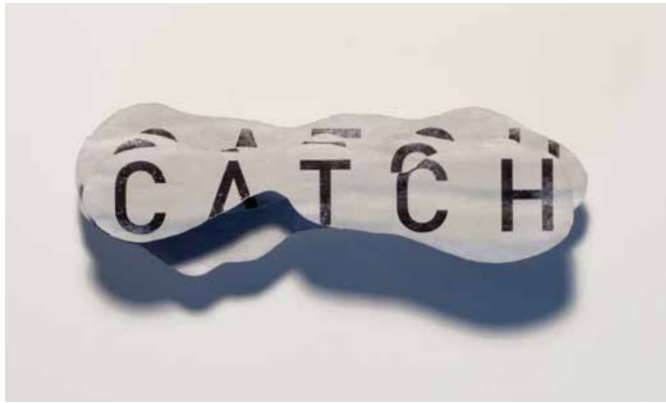
CATCH • MEET

The relationship of *catch* and *meet* comes from the title, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Holden is walking on the streets of New York and hears a kid incorrectly singing *Comin Thro’ the Rye*, by Robert Burns. He sings, “if a body catch a body comin thro’ the rye” when in fact the lyric is, “if a body meet a body comin thro’ the rye.” It is meant to be a romantic song, but Holden’s interpretation is different. Holden imagines kids playing in a field of rye near a cliff, and he sees himself catching the kids when they start to run near the cliff’s edge. He pictures himself as catcher in the rye, savior of children, protecting them from innocence’s fall into adulthood. This mistake of *catch* for *meet* is important, because catch and meet imply very different feelings. Catch is about capturing and holding tight, while meet implies a sense of freedom and self-direction. This contrast sums up Holden’s struggle throughout the story – stop time, or grow up.



Concrete letters are molded together so they permanently lock into each other expressing the feeling of *catch* – capturing the word, holding it tightly in place. There is no movement in this material, the letters are set stiff. The rigid quality of the concrete lends itself to the interpretation of the word *catch*, amplifying its meaning in this particular way.

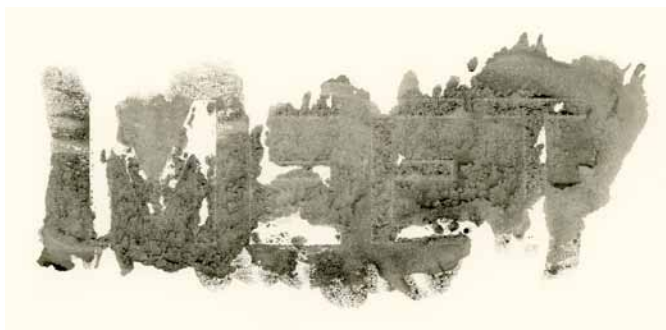




The word *catch* is preserved in concrete. Captured, printed on paper, and embedded permanently in this hard, stiff material, or transferred onto the surface of the concrete. When multiple pieces are combined into three-dimensional collages and photographed, the words begin echoing each other, shattering as if they are falling off a cliff. Some compositions have the feeling of a reverberating voice, like yelling in a canyon. In the most successful versions, the word feels contained and captured, yet has a kinetic energy resembling something repeatedly falling into water. The ripples caused by that force are present, but frozen in concrete.



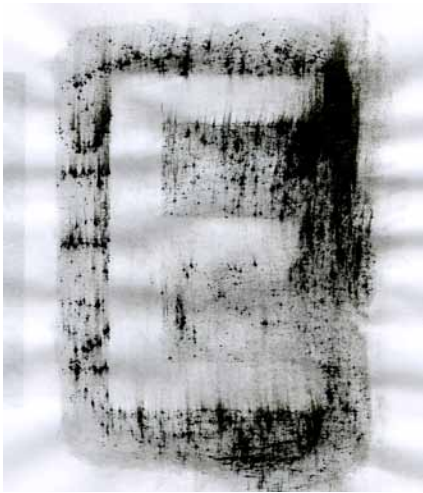
CAPTURE AND HOLD TIGHT



Meet, on the other hand, feels like freedom – it is much looser than *catch*. I used laser prints to create a series of monoprints. When I paint ink on laser prints, the ink shies away from the toner areas and flows more easily onto the paper, making laser prints into monoprint plates. These plates were covered in ink and pressed onto paper. The ink is free, fluid, and messy, moving where it wants as it meets the paper. Layering multiple prints on top of each other, on a single sheet of paper, revealed how repeating the words caused a fusion. The aesthetic effects of the ink embed a feeling of freedom and fluidity in the word, visualizing the meaning of *meet*.



FEELS LIKE FREEDOM



Left: The printing plates themselves are also of value. These are the leftover laser prints after they have been pressed into the paper. They create a texture, a rhythm, and have an ease that also reinforces the freedom of *meet*.

Middle: When the ink bled through the back of the laser print, I was given another set of forms. This inky, ghostly quality comes from the freedom of the ink to move through the paper and emerge on the other side – the opposite of Holden catching children and capturing them before they cross the line into adulthood. When materials contradict meaning, they actually help to amplify meaning.

The contrasting materials of concrete and ink, and the connotations that they each carry, enhance the meaning of the words, and point the viewer to a specific interpretation of the differences between *catch* and *meet*. Tension between rigidity and fluidity becomes even more apparent with the addition of digitally set type.



IF A BODY MEET A BODY COMIN THRO' THE RYE,
IF A BODY KISS A BODY, NEED A BODY CRY?

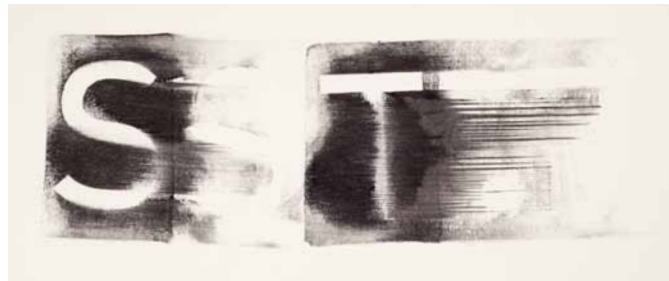
STASIS • MOTION

The story ends as Holden watches his younger sister Phoebe on the carousel in Central Park. She is in motion, going round and round on the carousel, but because it’s going around in a circle, she is actually in a state of stasis. Holden realizes that he can’t prevent Phoebe (or himself) from growing up. He begins to accept the reality of time passing, of not being in control. Regardless of how hard he tries to remain still, he is alive and in motion — stasis is not possible.

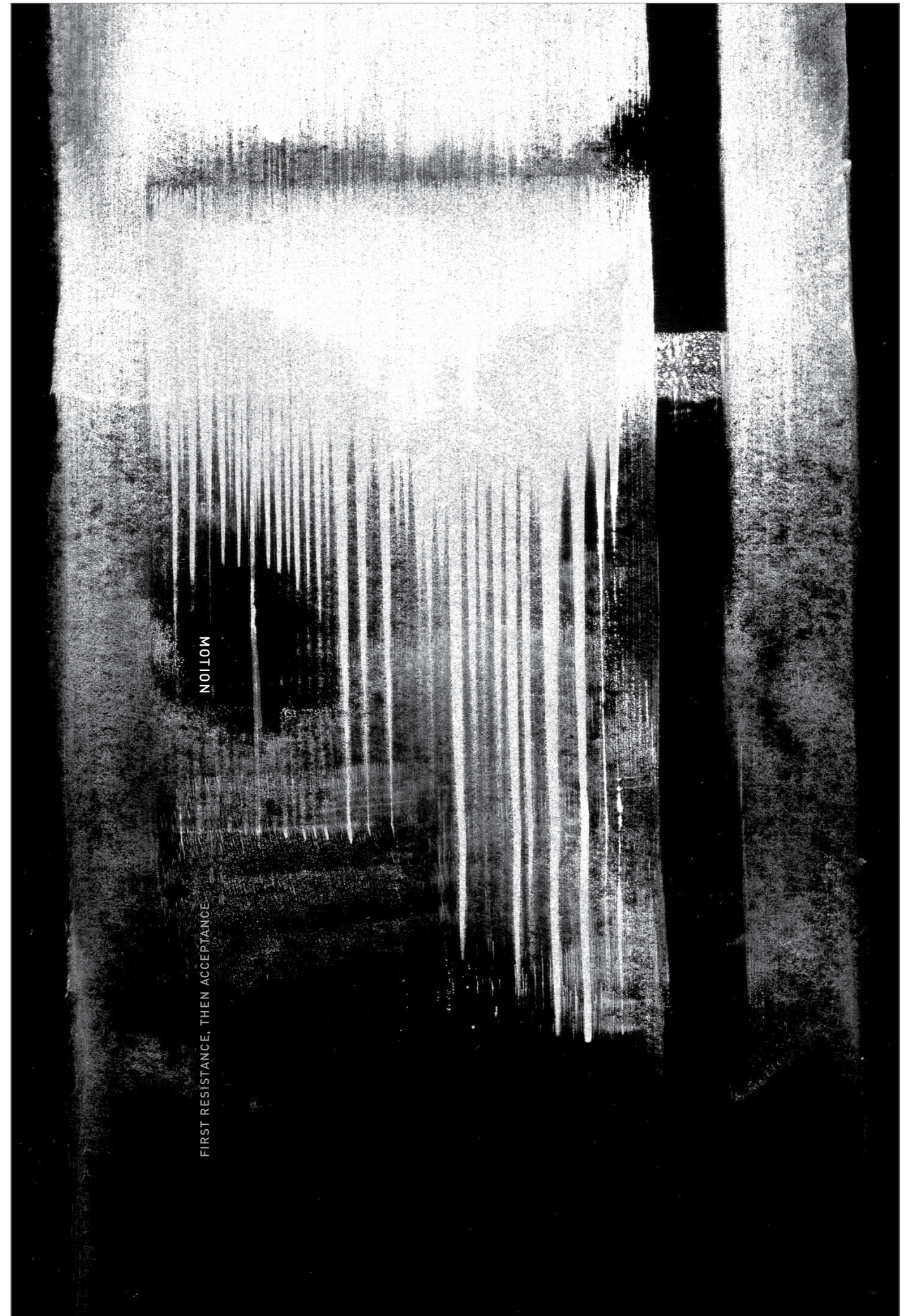


The words *stasis* and *motion* were printed with my rubber molds, using them as stamps. My body’s motion ties the words together by pulling the stamps, leaving an ink trail and a residue connecting the two words. A visual pull between stasis and motion is achieved.





The stamp's rubber material sticks to the page creating a vibration as I pull. The stamps resist my body's motion. They jump. They try to hold on to the paper, as Holden tries to hold on to moments. This contradiction is made visual by the kinetic way I created the word *stasis*.



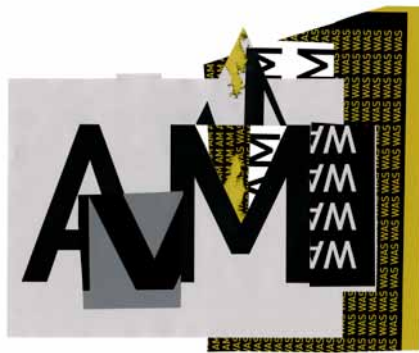
AM · WAS

Holden tells his story in the first person, and is constantly losing track of tenses – suddenly switching from past to present in the middle of thoughts and paragraphs. The words *am* and *was* were selected as content for this investigation because they capture Holden’s inability to control changing tenses.



A jumble of letterforms speaks to the confused quality of the narrative. *Was* and *am* can be seen, but are difficult to decipher at first glance. The dimension inherent in the concrete letterforms gives the glyphs a sense of body and weight. The letterforms become building blocks, solid markers that Holden can grasp – parallel to the way in which his words and narrative help him persist in the past as he collides with the future. His constant switch in tenses is an example of his struggle with this impossible desire to control time.

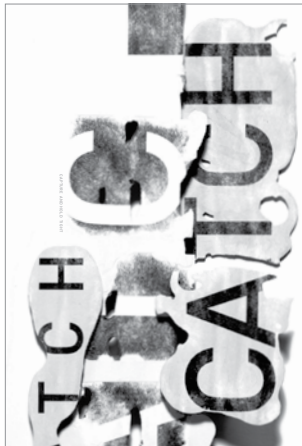
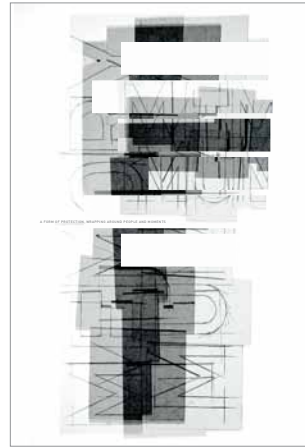
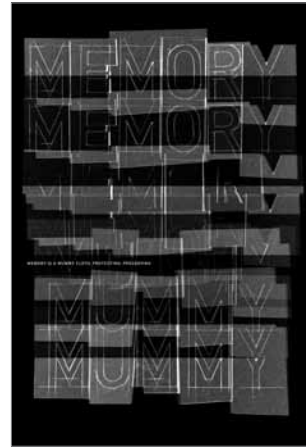
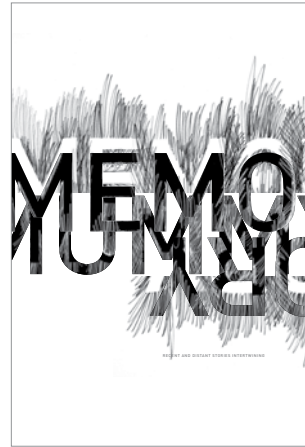




Patterns from the words *am* and *was* were created and printed on various types of paper, then cut and pieced back together. The words are fractured, like the interruptions when Holden suddenly changes tenses in his narrative. These collages have the disconnected quality of Holden's narrative and the sense of confusion one has when told a disjointed story. They reference the idea of past and present meshing and influencing each other, the way one's memories are altered and evoked by the present. Past and present are like threads weaving in and out of each other, represented here as intertwining words on many scales and layers.



STORYTELLING FROM MULTIPLE TENSES
SHUTTLE BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT



Reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, I imagine it takes place in black and white. Some critics of the book believe the story is inspired by black and white movies of the 1930s and 1940s. Holden is often imitating film characters or actions. For this reason, it seemed appropriate to keep my work black and white. Plus, the monotone palette facilitates a cohesive series.

The process of transformation from an immature form to an adult form in two or more distinct stages. A change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means. *New Oxford American Dictionary*

METAMORPHOSIS STUDIES

The following studies are visual explorations of metamorphosis, using the word as both concept and typographic content. The concept of metamorphosis is parallel to my design process of combining physical materials with digital tools – I apply forces that propel materials to expand, change, and open up into new forms.

Letterforms composing the word *metamorphosis* were created using a combination of analog and digital tools, featuring materials and processes that underwent a transformation as I manipulated them. I used the inherent qualities of materials in an intentional way, without forcing or controlling them, instead embracing the qualities materials freely afford.

In addition to considering metamorphosis within a single material, I am looking at how a letterform changes as it is executed across multiple materials – comparing an *E* in paper, to an *E* in paint, to an *E* in concrete, for example. When the letters are manifested in different materials, the concept of transformation becomes tactile. Metamorphosis becomes something we both read with our eyes and experience with our senses.

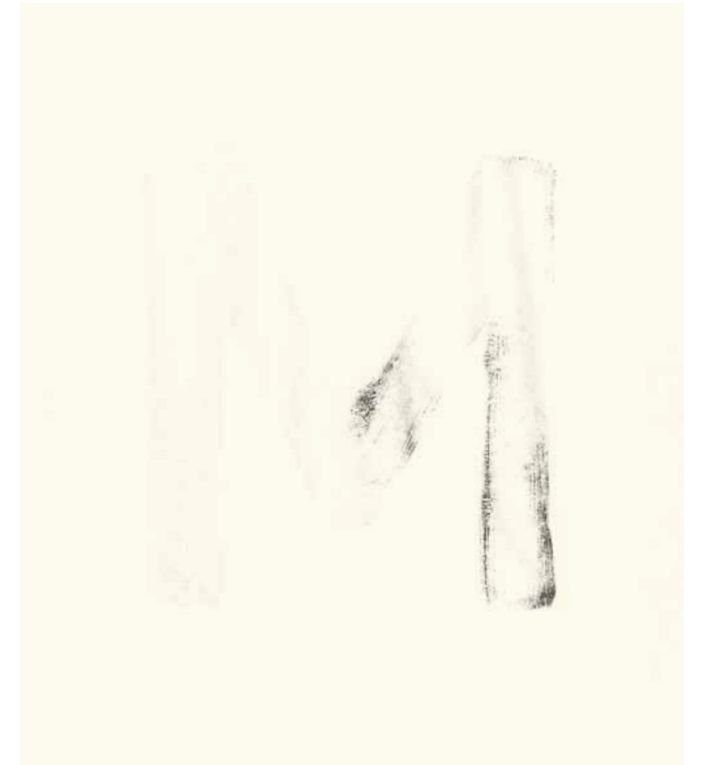
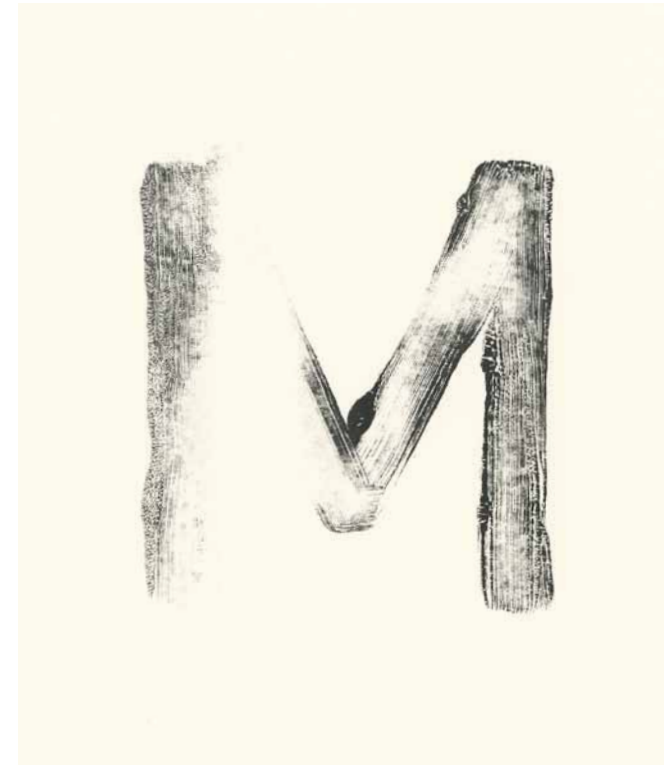
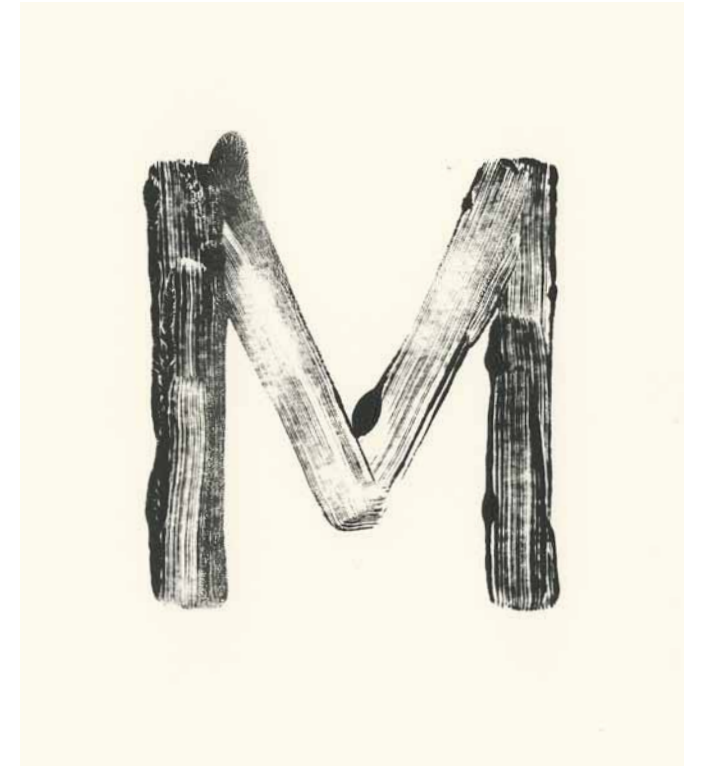
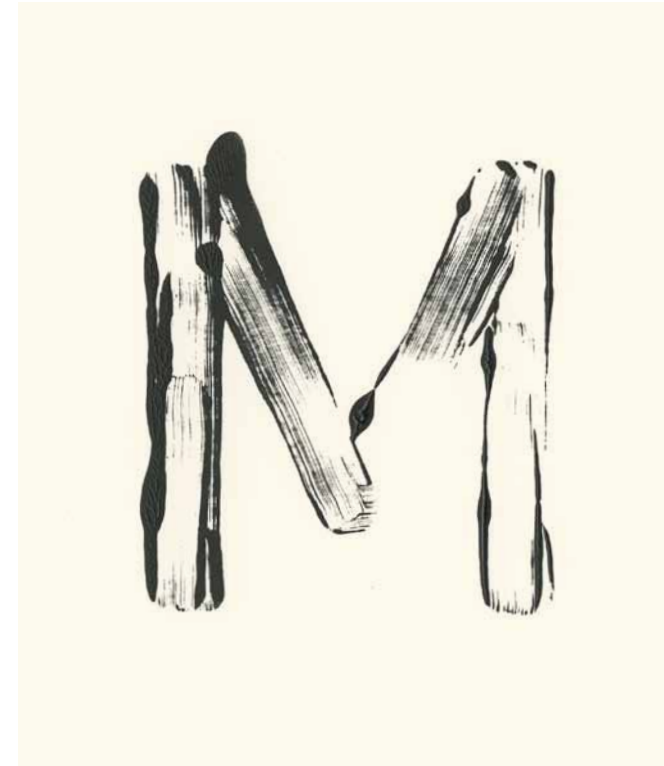
While I am creating these letterforms and photographing them, I am exploring how digital tools can expand the connotations of the objects by overcoming their material limits. For example, combining multiple shots to create unnatural light sources, or adjusting the color so radically that the original material starts to disappear, leaving behind only a skeleton of a letterform. Digital tools allow me to inject another level of metamorphosis into the letterforms.

The objective of this work is to communicate metamorphosis over a series of compositions, both semantically and syntactically: by spelling out the word, and infusing the letterforms with the aesthetic properties I gain from physical materials. Presented as a group, these studies visually communicate metamorphosis, using the word and materials to reinforce each other, using analog and digital synthesis to achieve it.

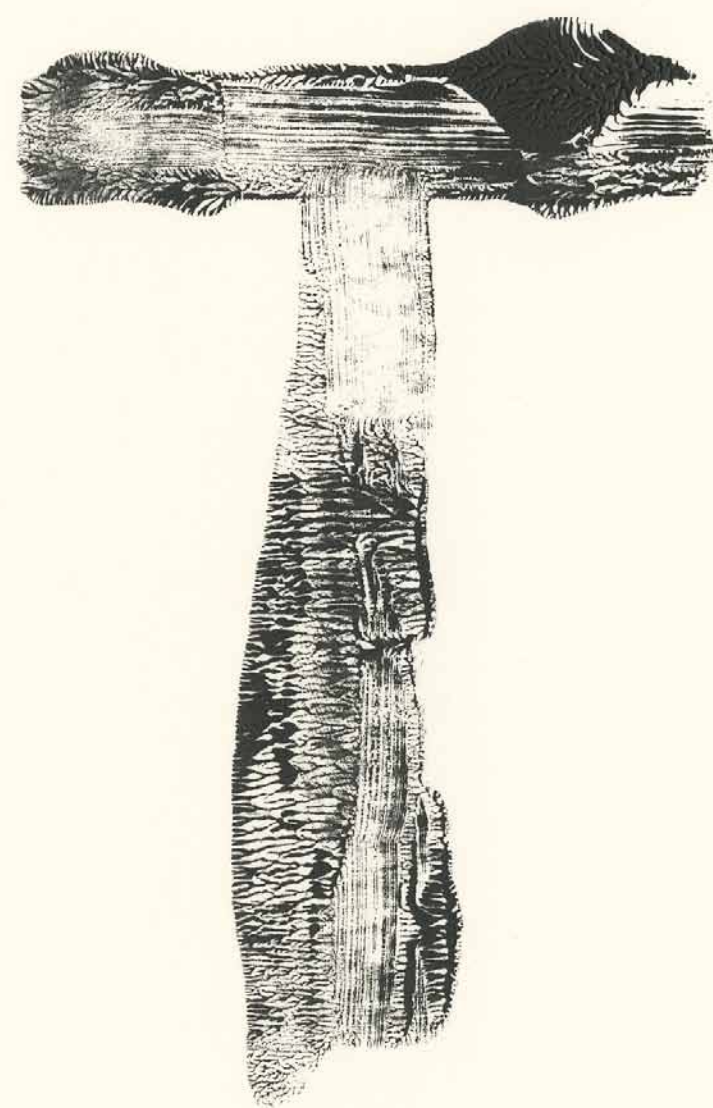
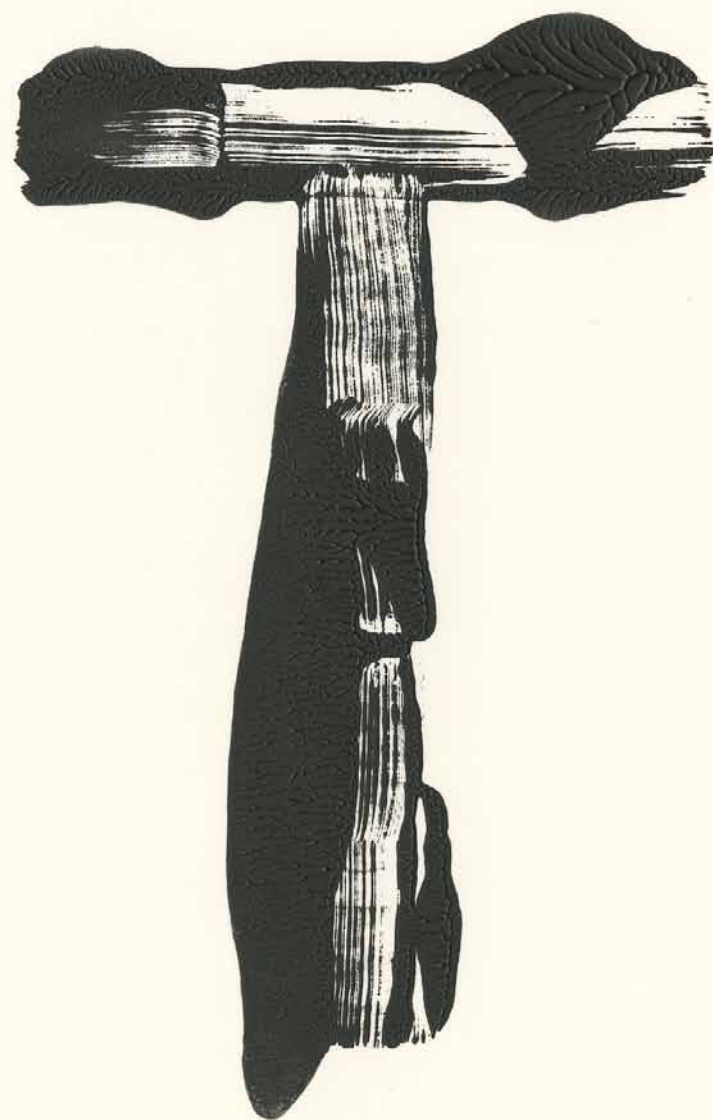
This work demonstrates that materials can be used to both form and inform visual communication. The inherent properties of materials provide specific aesthetic and psychological effects that can be harnessed into visual metaphors. While the viewer reads the word *metamorphosis*, she also experiences visual qualities that connote the idea of metamorphosis. The word is informed to a greater degree thanks to the echoes and traces of materials that are maintained in the images. Graphic design has the power to amplify the connotations of a word, increase understanding, and reveal layers of meaning – information is transmitted via the semantic and syntactic qualities of a design.

PAINT MONOPRINTS

In this study, strokes of letterforms are painted onto a piece of plexiglass by tracing a laser print template. Paper is then pressed onto the painted plexiglass surface to create a print. Four consecutive prints are pulled without repainting the strokes. When the paper and paint are pressed together, the careful, accurate strokes that were originally painted change dramatically. The blobs of paint flatten and expand. The letters begin morphing, and some very interesting, spontaneous forms appear.



The four consecutive pulls create a change in visual volume – the first one is loud and bold, and by the fourth the letterform has become much quieter. A visual manifestation of *piano* and *forte* emerges.





When the prints are shuffled out of order, a pattern emerges due to the change in visual volume. Rearranging the order of the pulls creates a visual rhythm and illustrates the concept of change.



When multiple prints are combined digitally, the change in volume becomes compressed – expressed within a single letterform as opposed to over four.

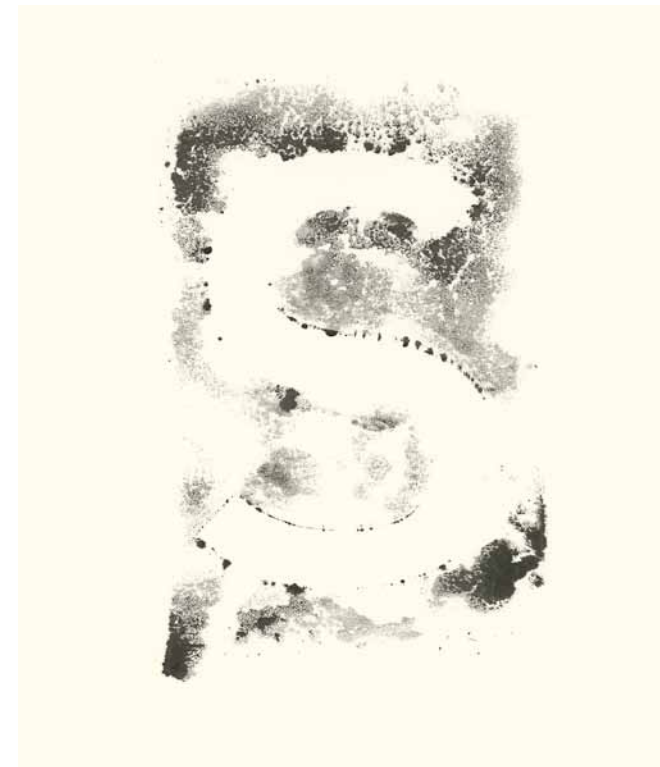


INK MONOPRINTS

This study also falls under the category of monoprint, but this time I am using ink instead of paint, and using my rubber molds as a surface instead of plexiglass. When I paint a small amount of black ink on my molds, the ink and the rubber resist each other and the ink beads up. It doesn't look like there is very much ink on the mold at all, but when I press the mold onto a piece of paper, a change occurs. The ink has a similar effect to the paint in the previous study. The beads of ink flatten out and expand, leaving a print that is in fact quite dense. Similar to the paint monoprints, I took four pulls before re-inking to watch the letter change.



The sparse amount of ink on the mold is an illusion – when flattened, the ink expands to cover a surprisingly large area.

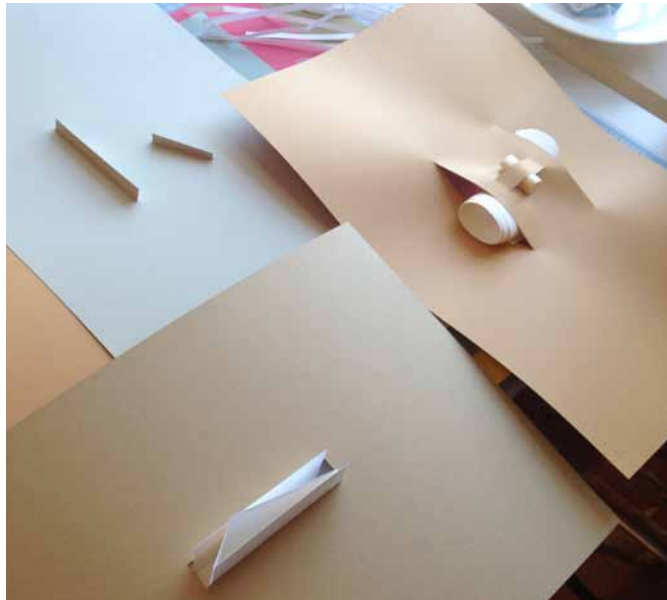
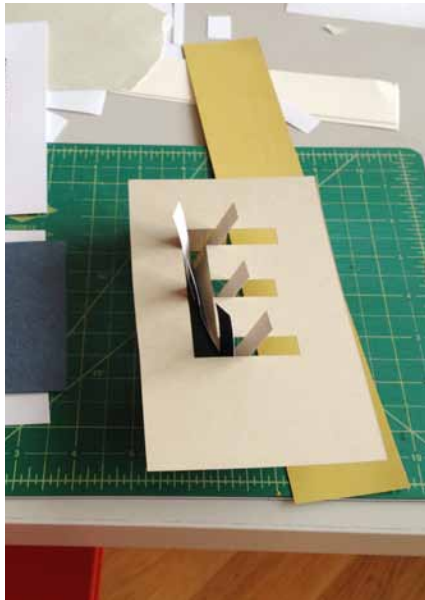




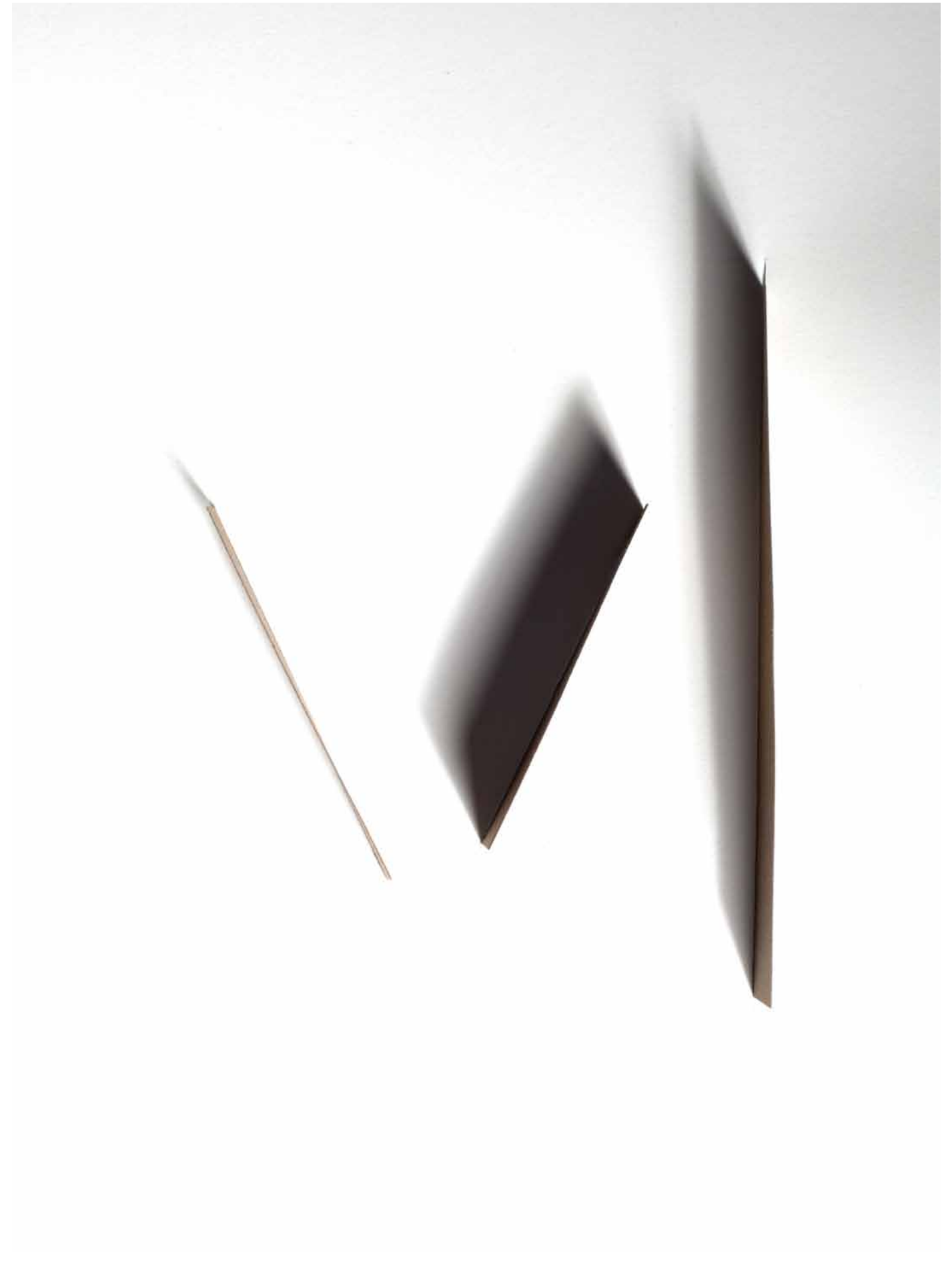
By pull number three or four, the letter starts to disappear. There is a turning point where the strokes change from being very obvious to more abstract. The structure of the letterform is still there, it has just started to recede. This effect is due to the inherent property of ink and paper together: absorption.

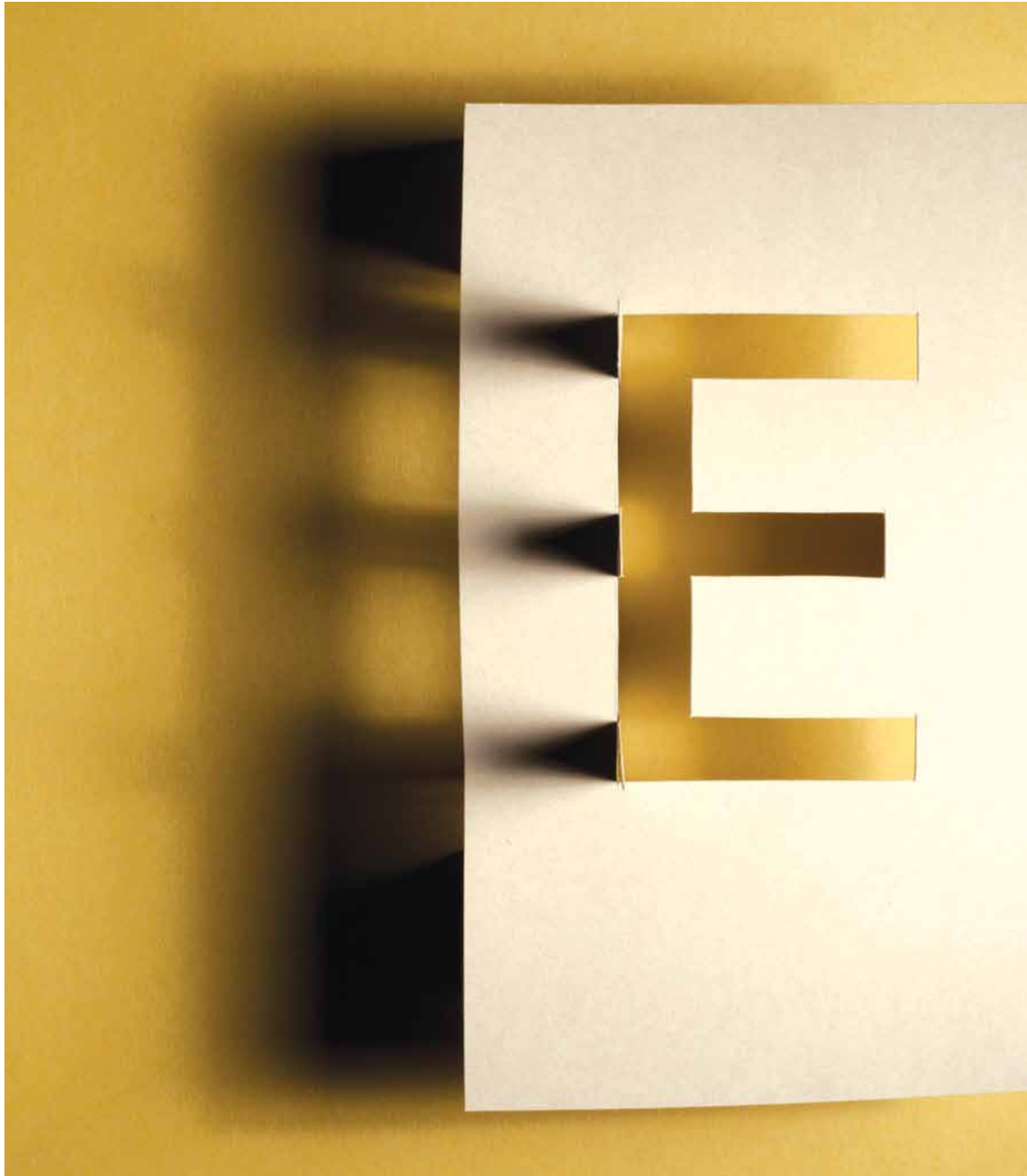
DIMENSIONAL PAPER

This group of studies focuses on paper as a material that can be used in both two and three dimensions. This is an inherent property of the material – it can function in both ways at the same time. By cutting slits in flat paper, I can insert more small pieces of flat paper perpendicularly to create three-dimensional forms. My lighting emphasizes the two-dimensional versus three-dimensional forms. Depending on how I arrange my light sources, the shadows fill in the strokes of the letterforms.



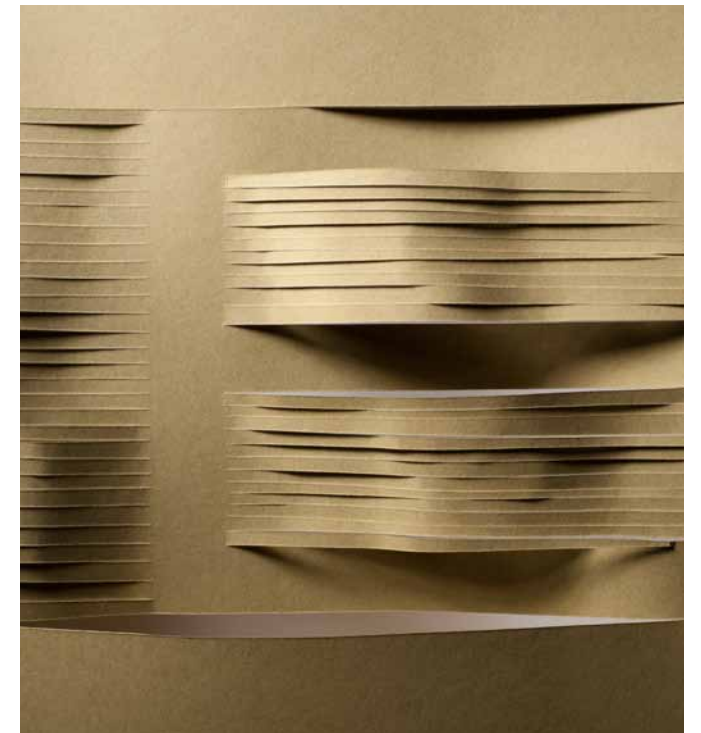
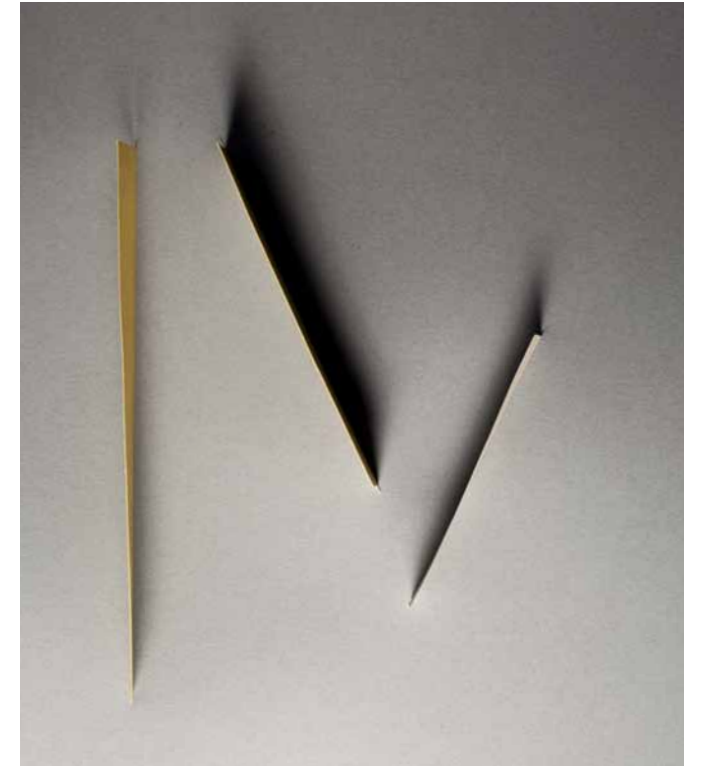
Simple paper constructions transform when they are taken off the cutting mat and photographed in an intensely-lit environment.





Above: Folding the flat *E* ninety degrees to the left, so it stands up on its edge, allows the light to use the cutout as a stencil. The *E* appears in the shadow as an echo of the paper form.

Opposite: Variations of the slit/strip technique. Taking the flat surface and shifting it, rotating it in space, encourages the *E* to emerge in three dimensions. Another study uses repeating parallel cuts instead of inserting separate pieces.

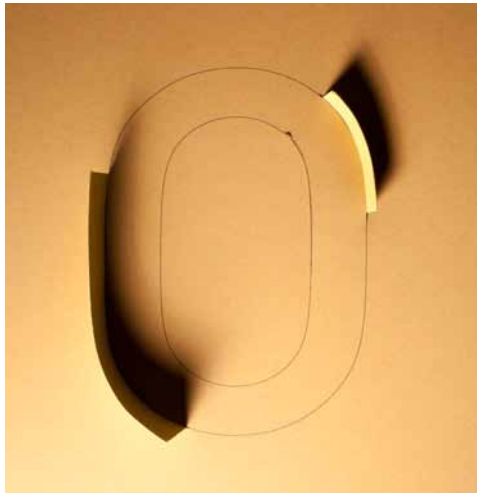
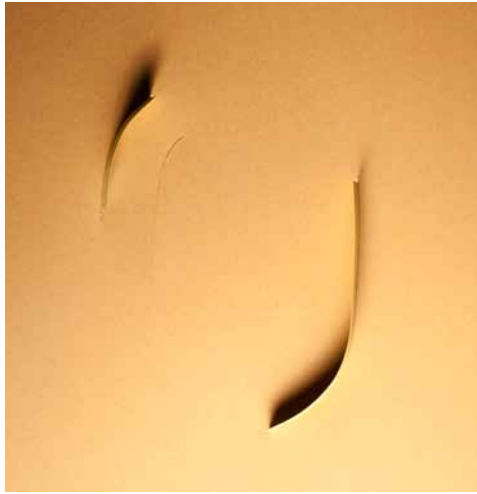
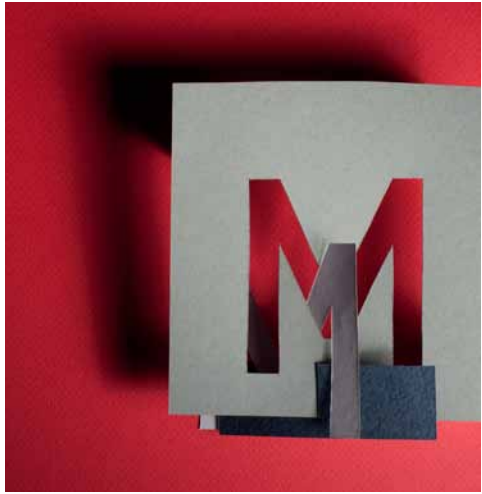




This page: A dramatic transformation occurs in the images simply by changing the light source. The shadows play a huge part in creating the form of these two Ts. The paper construction has not changed, just the light source.

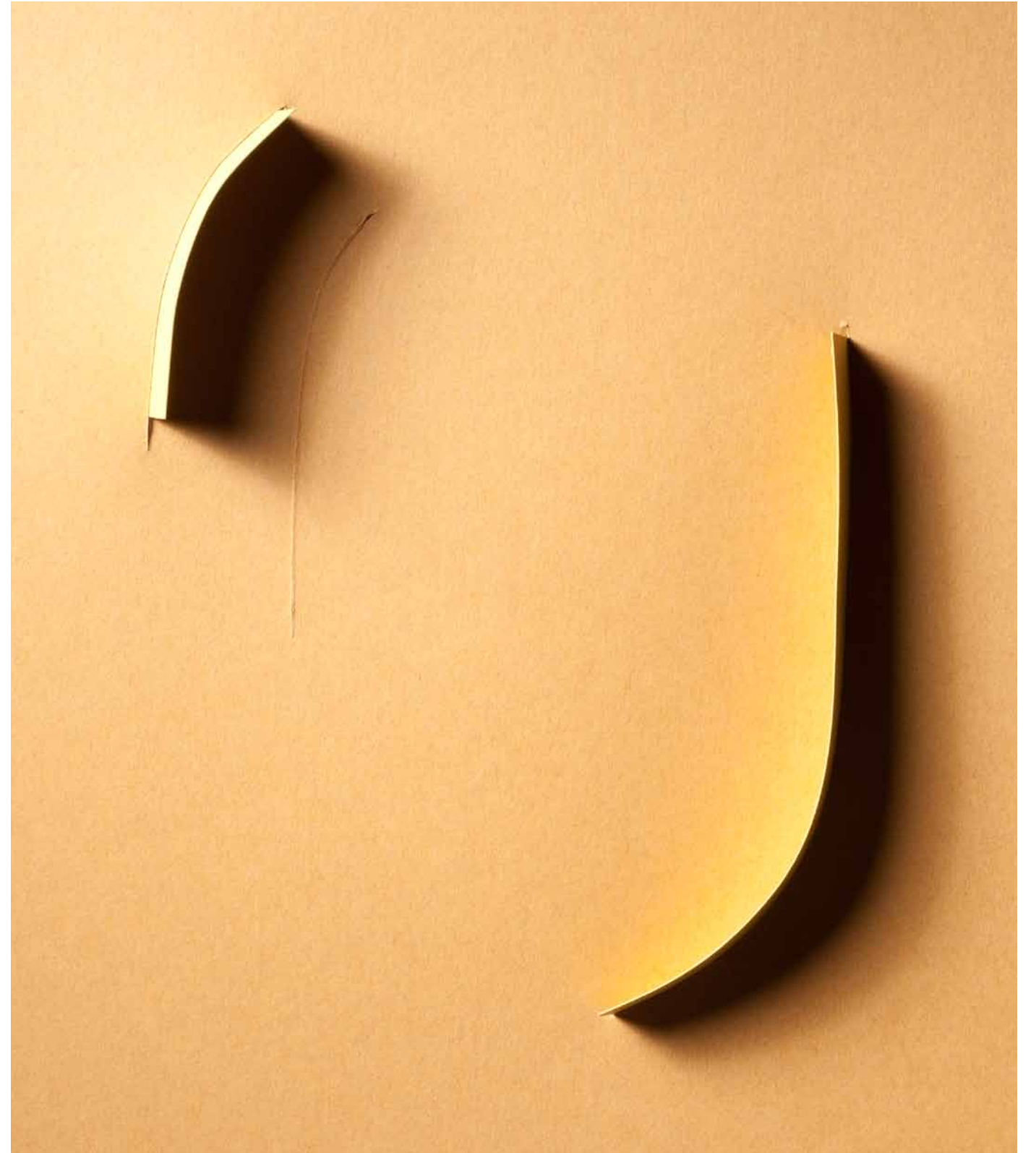
Opposite: A digital composite of the front and back of the paper construction. My guide is visible on the back – the laser print outline of the letter that I cut into to maintain a clean, crisp shape.

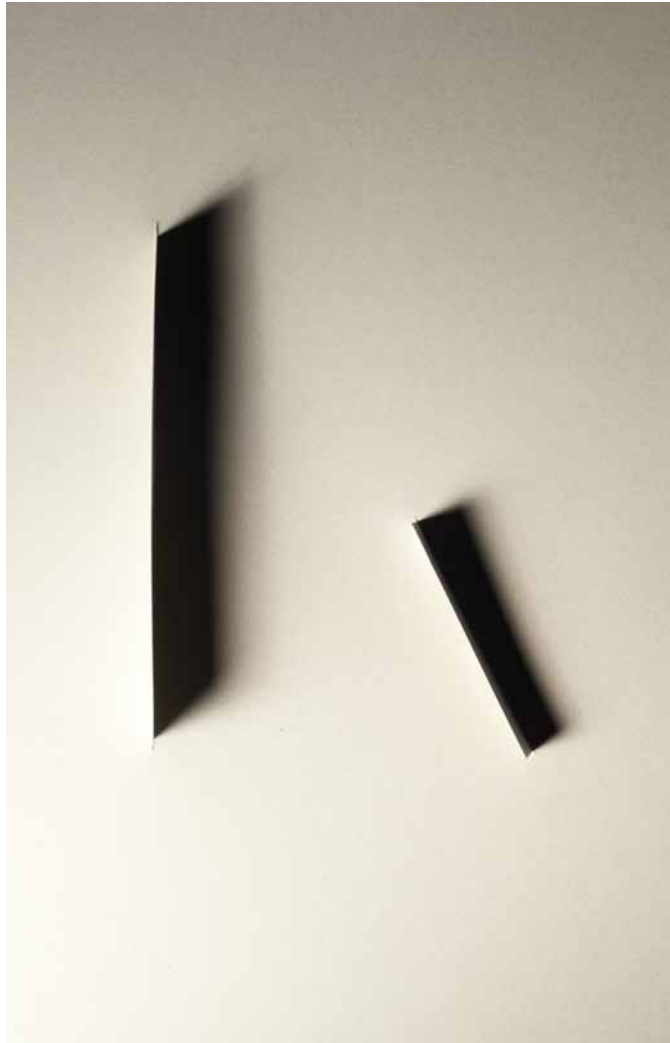




Using colored sheets of paper infuses the images with hues that feel natural, as opposed to being digitally applied or forged via digital effects.

Various views of the O demonstrate the potential for manipulating light to enhance paper form. On the right, the shadows become more dominant than the paper in defining the letterform.

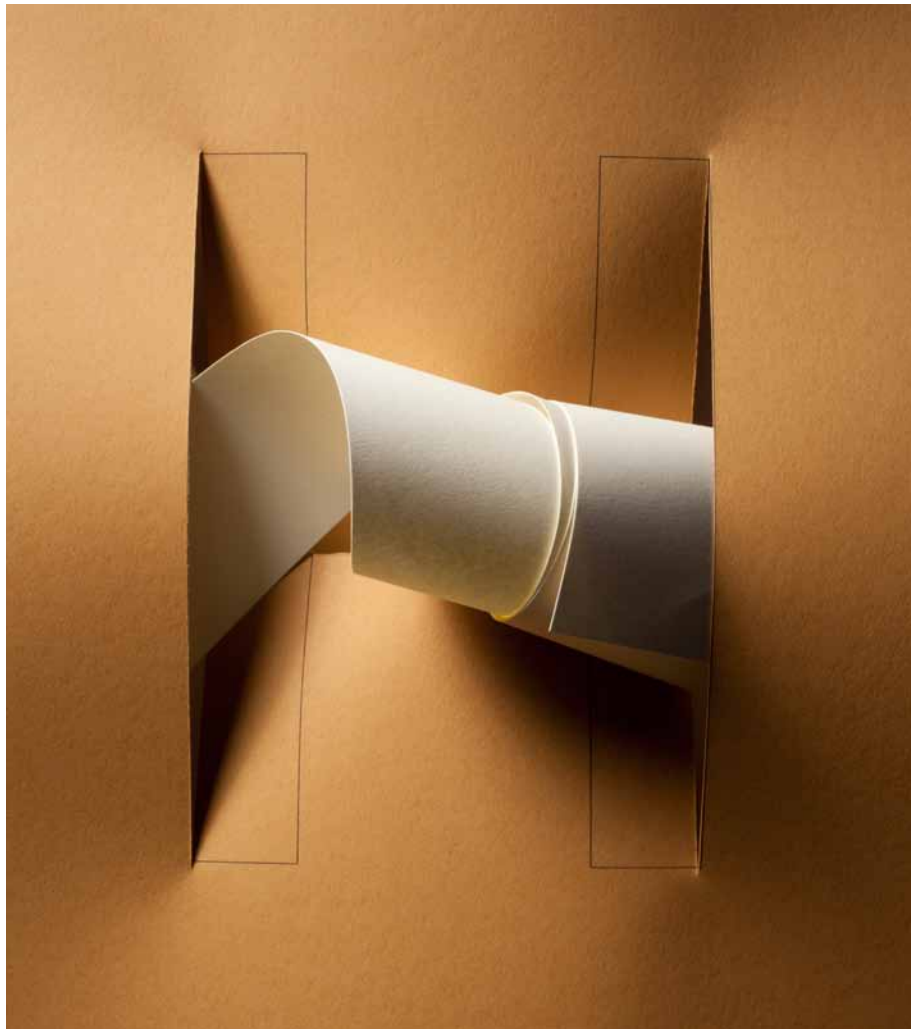




Sometimes a hint is enough to identify a letterform.

Opposite: How much *P* is necessary to communicate the letterform? Not much. A single curve will do it. Adding another cut to this form changes the shadows and makes the *P* even more apparent.





One of paper's best qualities is its ability to hold tension. The material has a lot of latent energy. In these *H* studies, paper slits hold the tension of rolled paper strips.

If I let it, the rolled paper will start to unravel. With a little nudge, the paper releases its energy. The material lets out a sound, as if it is breathing and exhaling a sigh of relief. The rolled paper wants to open up.

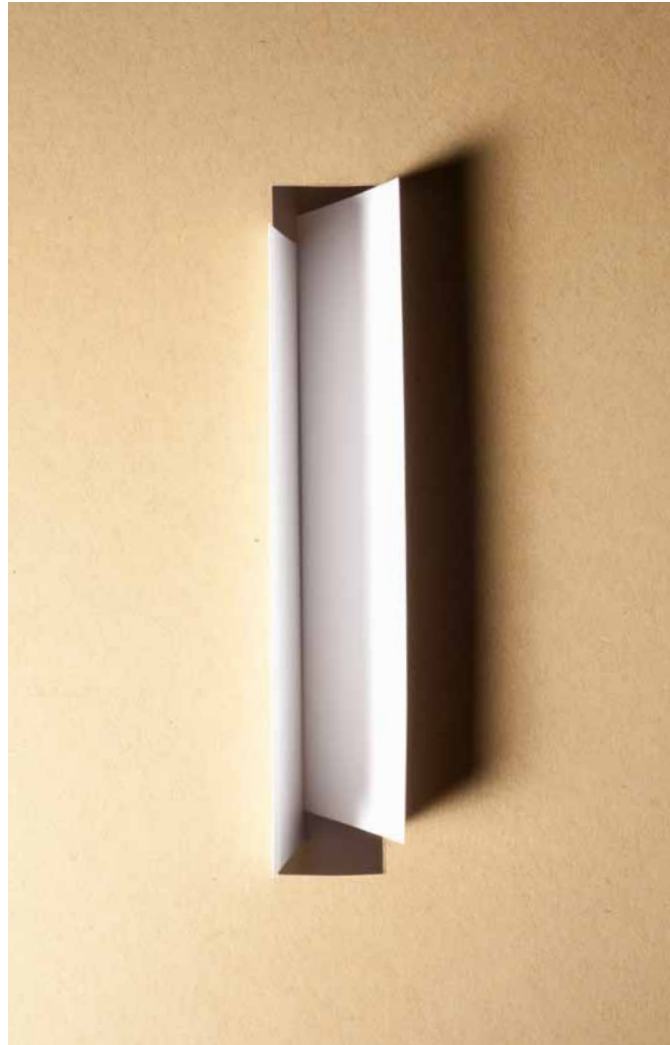
Even when it is set free, the paper form maintains the essential quality of an *H* - two parallel strokes.



Above: A cutout O holds smaller rolled paper Os in place - another example of the tension extant inside of paper. When the cutout is removed, the Os open up and are set free. They let out a 'pew!' as they can finally relax.

Opposite: Raising the inserted strip away from the flat surface creates a hole in the shadow of the S. In the bottom right corner, the strip and the shadow break apart. The paper strip jumps out of the page, separating from it. This image has more life to it than some of the other paper studies because of this detail. It holds more momentum to change, to go through a metamorphosis.





Above: The *I* is such a simple form – a rectangle. By giving some dimension to the paper, it comes to life. The *I* grows and unfolds.

Opposite: Rolled paper creates the effect of the terminals of the *S* starting to curl away, peeling up as if they are shedding layers of skin.



DIMENSIONAL PAPER WITH INK MONOPRINTS

After scanning, the ink monoprints seemed a little flat. To bring them to life, I started cutting into them, adding folds and additional pieces of paper. They undergo another step in their transformation. This set of studies are a combination of the dimensional paper and the ink monoprints.



Above: Lighting has a dramatic effect and changes the illusion of this *M* as being convex or concave. In fact this is the exact same piece, just photographed two different ways. Look at the top right terminal of both *M*s – the left image appears to curl up towards you, and the right image appears to curl down away from you.

Below: Incorporating color paper as a background alters the piece. Yellow peeks through the cut area on the left of the letterform. This effect emphasizes the illusion of the *M* multiplying and growing out of the page.

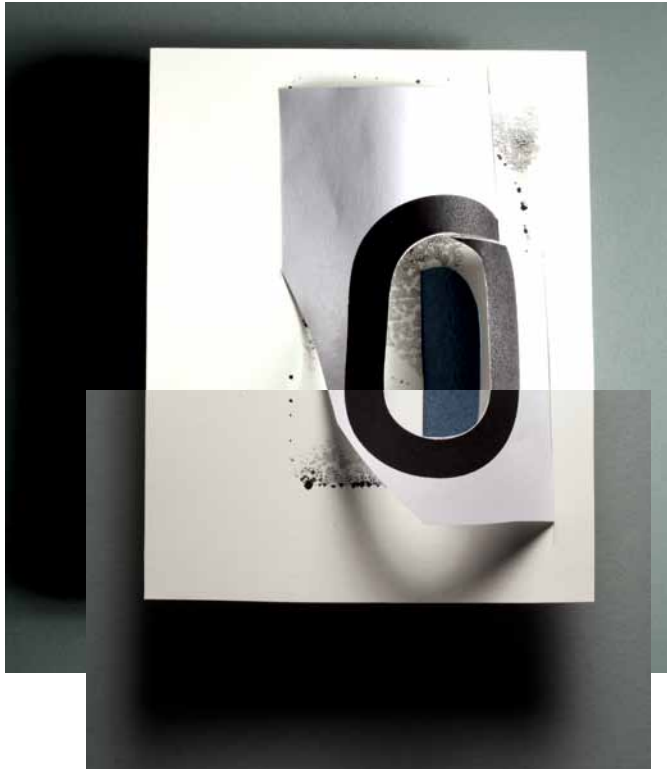




Folded paper creates the illusion that the background is crawling up through the counterform of the *H*.



The addition of another element, a concrete *H*, creates the illusion that the letter is retreating or advancing in or out of the container of the paper *H*. The *Hs* hold each other, like nesting dolls.



A range of O studies demonstrate the possibilities of pairing paper and ink. On the far left, light is used to make paper semi-transparent in the counterform of the O. Next, digitally combining multiple photos with different light sources. On the far right, some scraps created an accidental O. These papers have the effect of curling up off the surface, similar to the petals of a flower.



When a solid black *S* merges into the ink monprint, it sinks as if it is in quicksand, and tries to hold on to the edge as it is slowly submerged.

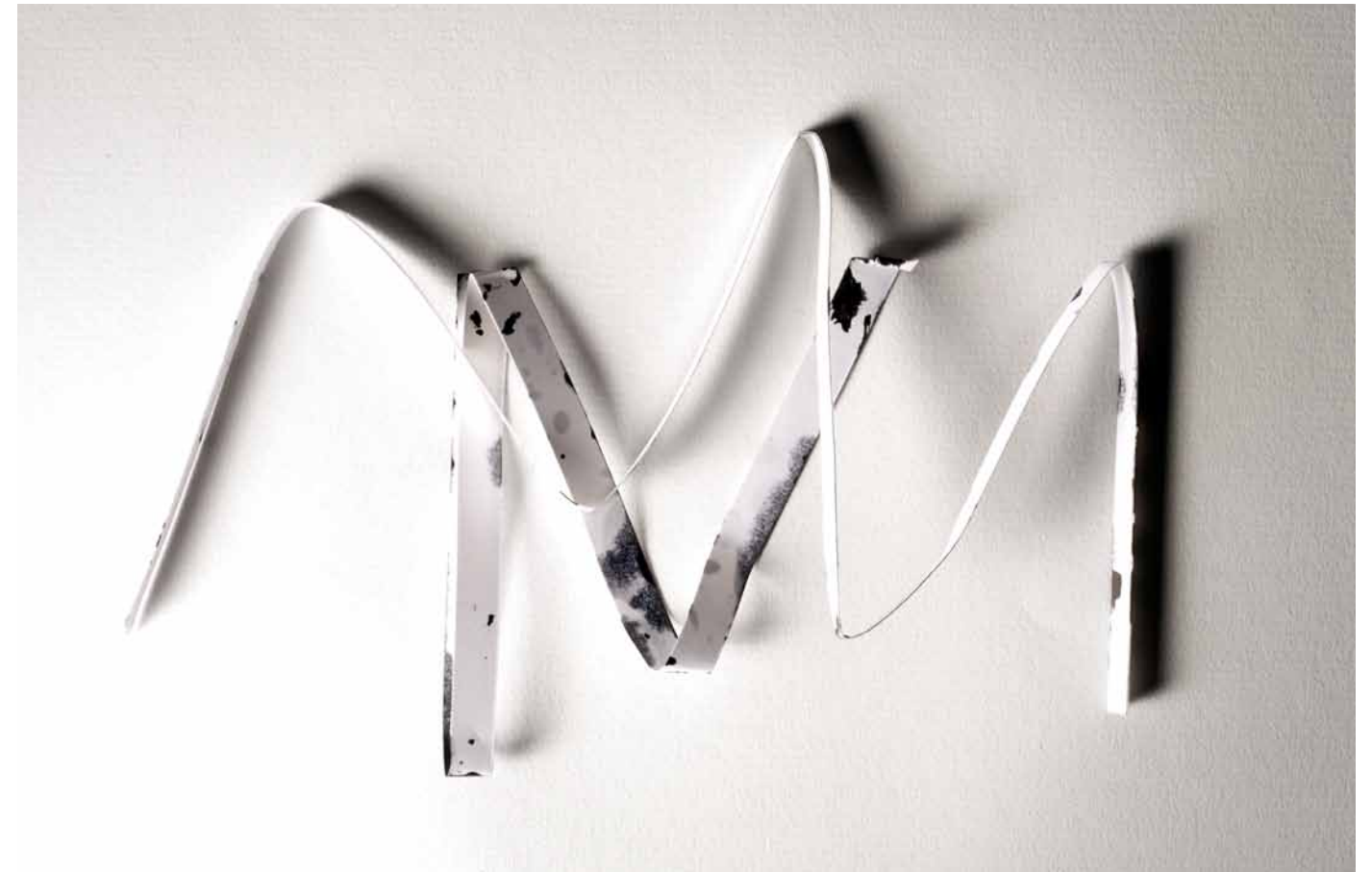
PAPER STRIPS IN MOLDS

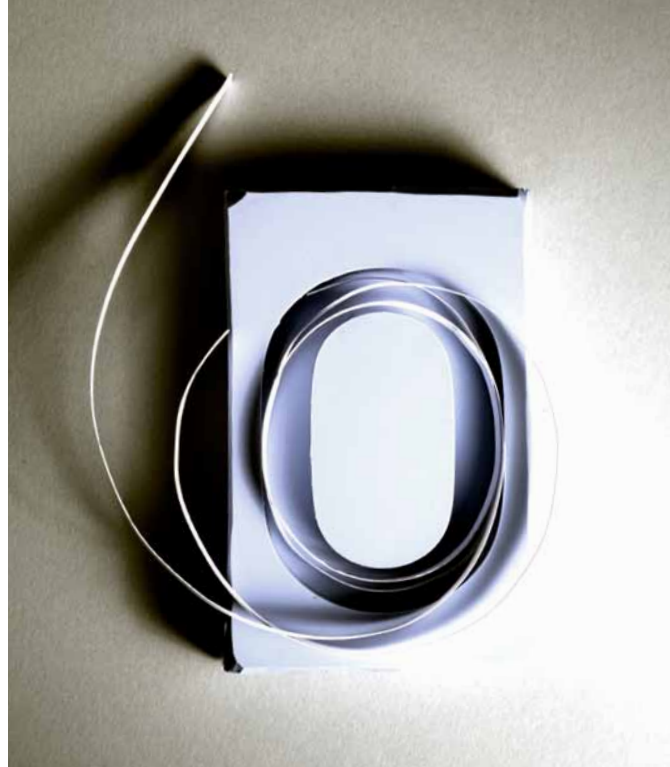
I have an ever-growing pile of thin paper strips lying around my studio, scraps from trimming other projects. Interesting things happen when they are folded and stuffed into the rubber molds — the paper creates another layer of dimension inside of the mold itself.



Opposite: When separated from the mold, the strips hold their shape at varying levels of accuracy depending on how much force was exerted when pressing and folding them in the mold. The paper strips alone become another iteration of the letter to photograph. The molds hold the paper in place. When the paper is released, it opens up and lets out a sigh of relief.

Bottom: Adding an acrylic letterform takes the place of the mold as a ghost, supporting the paper strips.





Digital tools allow me to divorce the form of the letter from the literal sense of the rubber mold. The mold is purple, very recognizable. Once it becomes a photograph, I can focus in on the black shadows and the white paper strips and uncover forms like this skeleton of an O (opposite). These forms are lying dormant, camouflaged by reality, waiting for me to discover them by digitally adjusting the illusion of what is real.



The digital transformation is dramatic. The *l* and *P* above become archeological relics, skeletons of letterforms.

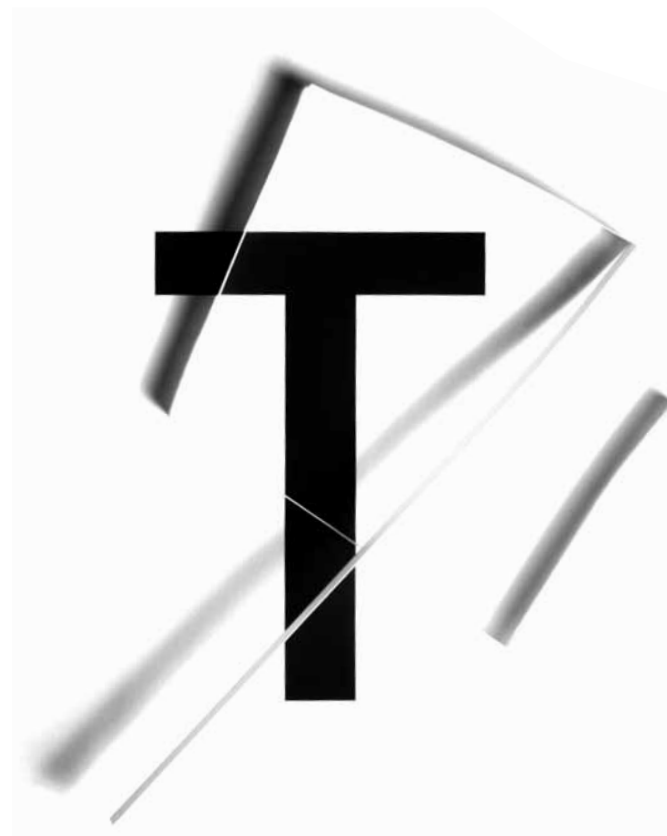
PAPER STRIPS ON LASER PRINTS

Building on the previous study, this next group of images uses paper strips on top of laser prints instead of in molds. I noticed that when my paper strips were lying on my desk, awaiting their turn on the stage, that they were affecting its surface. Their presence created shadows, planes, and structure. Sliding a laser print letterform underneath a few paper strips revealed a surprising illusion. These studies celebrate paper's natural tendency to shift from two- to three-dimensional form as well as the power of light and shadow to dramatically alter composition.



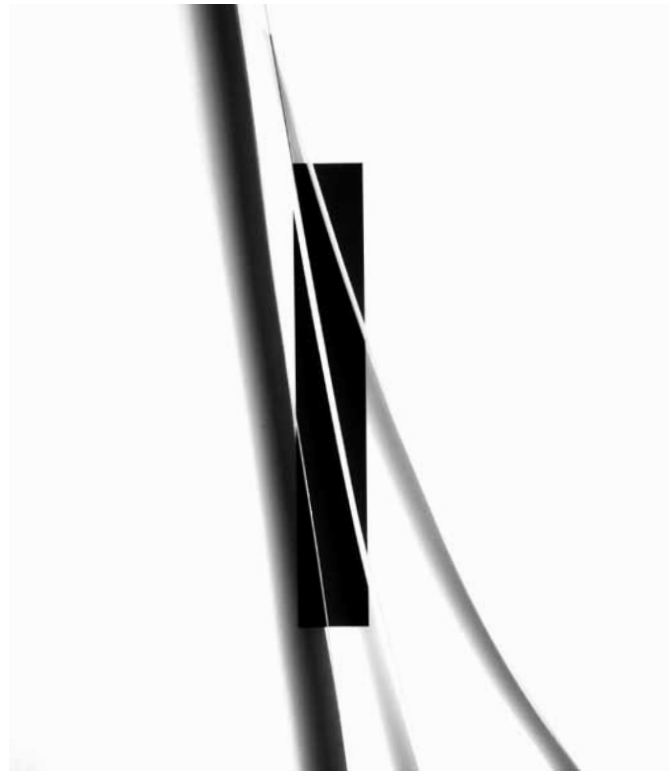
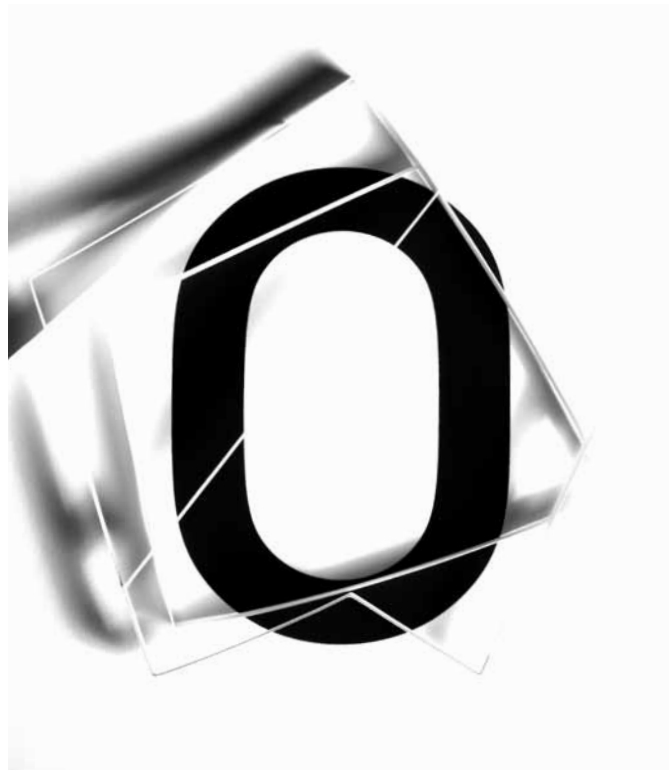
Opposite: Flat paper strips bisect and fragment the laser print letterform, as if I am drawing vector lines across it or slicing it up with scissors. Yet, the paper incites shadow and dimension – this image could not be created with vector lines, it is dependent upon the paper for its visual quality.





Shadows of the paper strips create the illusion of dimensional planes receding and advancing from the letterforms. Many photographs were taken of each letter with different arrangements of paper strips. In general, I used strips that mimicked the stroke of the letterforms – the *M* fuses with straight strips, distinct crisp folds, and the *O* fuses with softer, rounder strips. The *R* uses a combination of straight, folded, and rounded strips. The strips were spontaneously thrown on the laser prints.



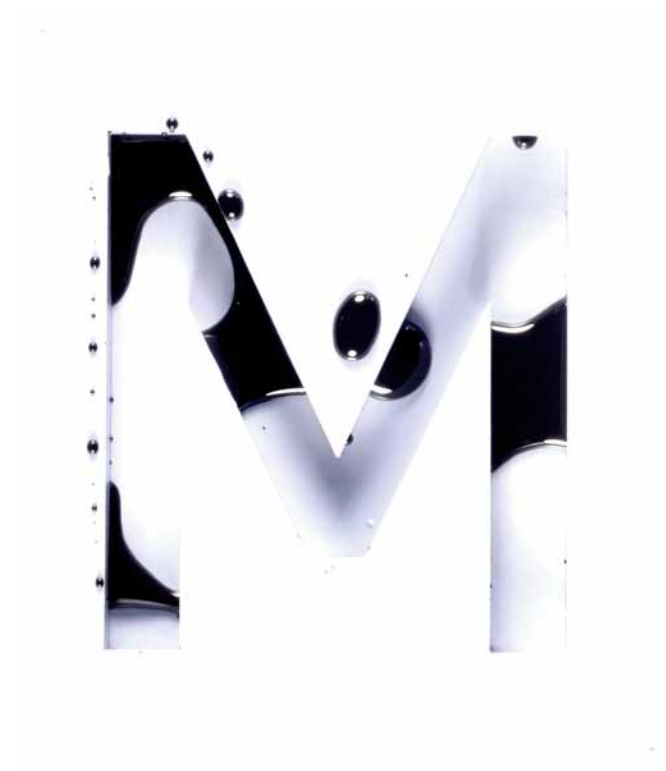


A pattern begins emerging across the *Metamorphosis* studies – a pattern of a material being encouraged to change form, to transform, in ways that surface naturally. I am not forcing the materials, handcuffing them, or commanding them. I am nudging them and watching what happens thanks to their inherent properties. The contrast of dense black toner against white paper creates an illusion of dimension and movement that is both highly convincing and honest in its simplicity.

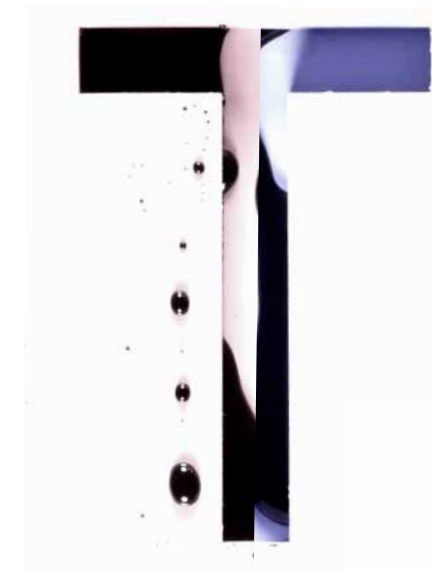


INK IN AND ON MOLDS

These studies combine ink and molds. Although, here the ink is both inside and on the surface of the molds. Instead of printing on paper as in the earlier study, molds were used to create the images. I dropped a mixture of ink and water inside of the molds. The ink resists the rubber material, forming holes. As I move the mold around in my hands, the ink moves freely as mercury. The ink fills in more or less of the letterform as it wants to.



Once photographed, I manipulated the images. Parallel to the ink resisting the mold, the ink resists digital manipulation. The mold will disappear completely but the ink is determined to stay. Because the black ink is so dense, it remains very prominent and resists the adjustment of levels and curves. The mid-tone purple mold yields to the adjustment and fades out. The ink maintains its form, even when I push the image very far away from the original representation. I am left with these oozy letterforms that look flat and dimensional at the same time.



Opposite: In the upper right corner of this *E*, a drop of ink escaped and slid down the side of the mold to rest on the background paper.

This page: Two images of a *T* are spliced together into one. By combining multiple images, I am incorporating the liquid, moving quality of the ink into the static representation. The *A* is an overlay of two photos, which further emphasizes the movement of the ink as I rotate the mold in my hands between each shot. The same ink drop moves across the surface of the mold without breaking. In the lower left of the *A* you see two dots of ink that are in fact the same character. The dot became smaller when it came too close to the edge of the *A*, and a little bit leaked down into the mold cavity.



Above: Some of the images are very full of ink, others are more empty like this *M*. I photographed a range as I poured ink in and out of the molds.

Opposite: In this *O*, I am trying to emphasize the path of the ink by layering two images on top of each other with a rotation. This visually mimics the force I am applying with my hands in between each shot, capturing within a still image the motion the mold is experiencing as the ink moves around.



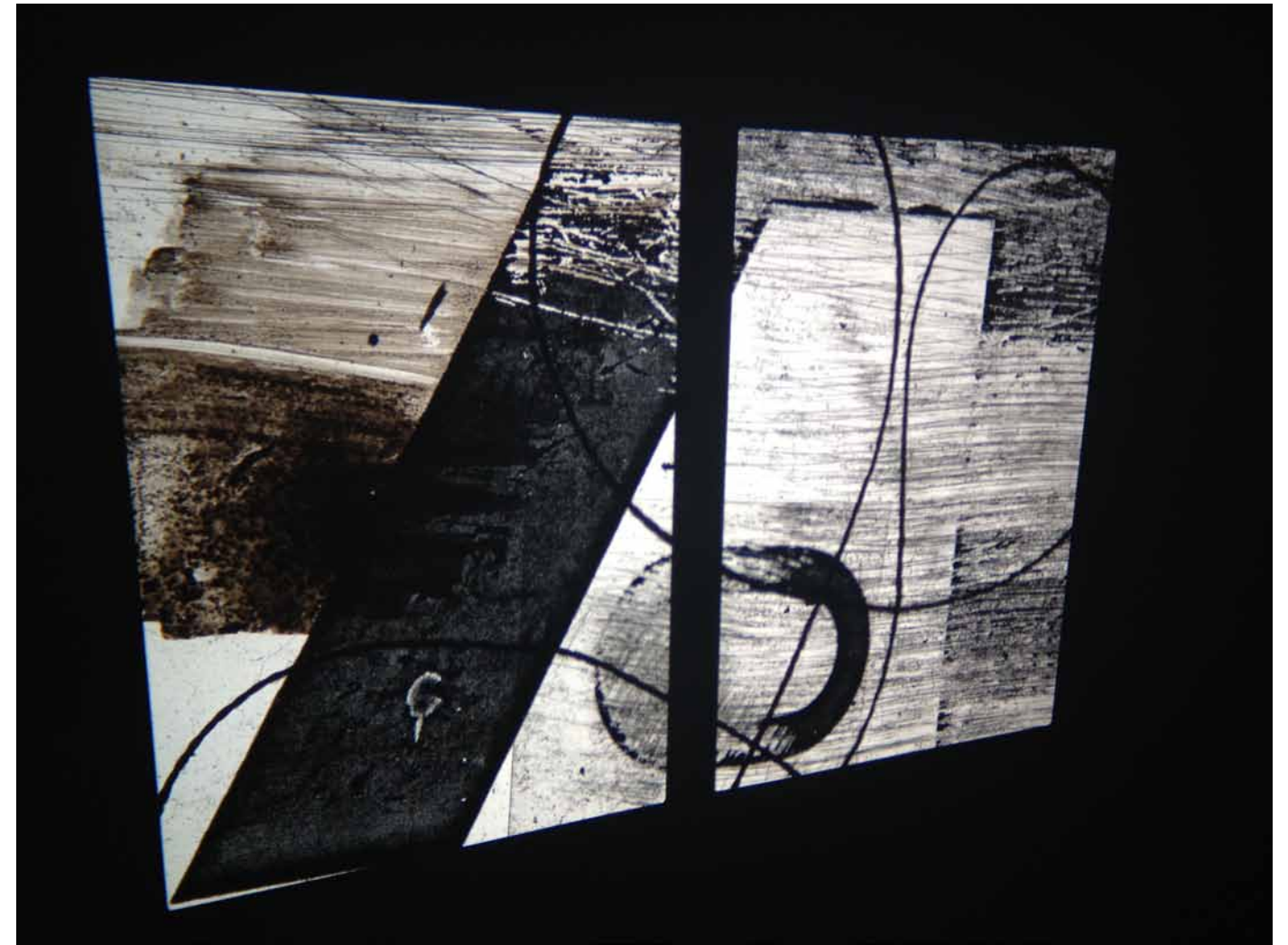


Opposite: In this *R*, two images break apart along the baseline. The *R* is separating, as if it is a cell dividing.

Above: The images don't have to be combined. I think there is intrigue in the single images alone, too. However, I do like the movement and ghostly quality that the combined images exude. The combination studies emphasize the change that occurs in the form of the ink as it swims around on top of and inside the mold, and leads the viewer to a more enhanced sensory understanding of the word *metamorphosis*.

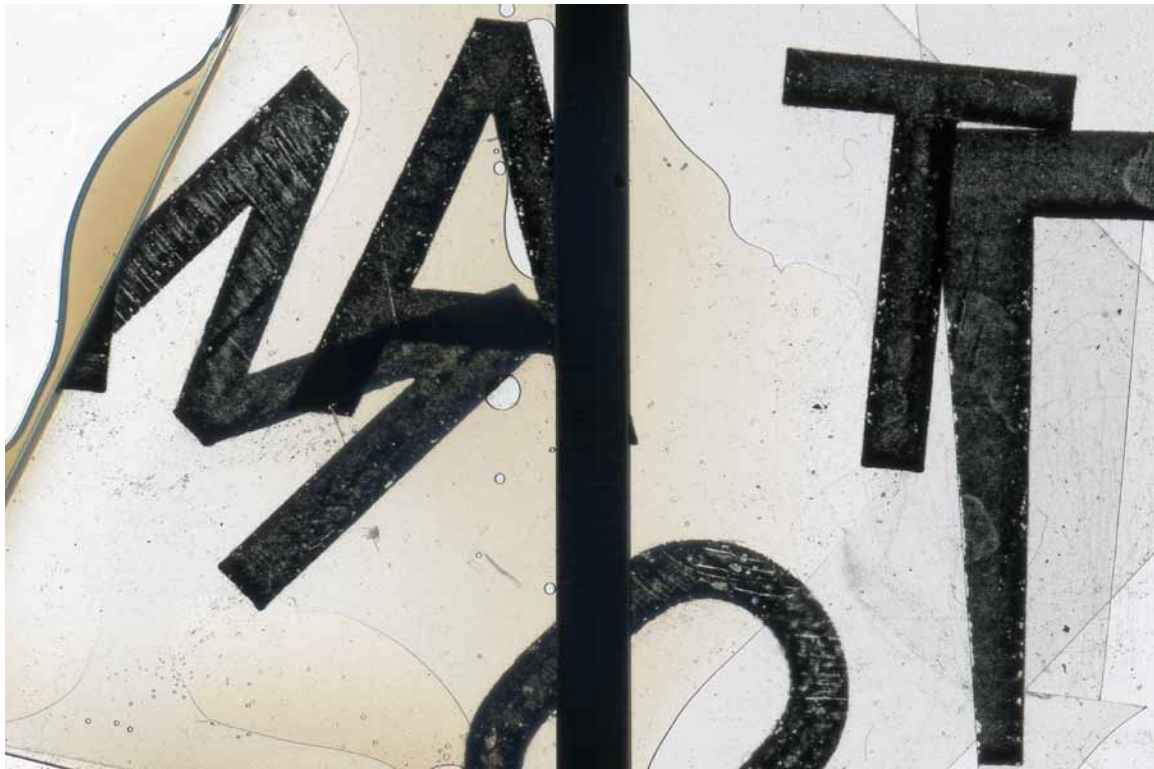
SLIDE COLLAGES

This group of studies is a series of collages in blank slide mounts. The collage material is a mix of media including laser prints, paper, thread, various pigments, and matte medium. I incorporated typography by printing on transparencies and then cutting the resulting sheets up. All of these elements come together as a collage in the slide mount. The compositions are very small scale, so I don't have a lot of control over the details. It's almost like collaging with my eyes closed. The collages undergo a transformation, a metamorphosis, when I project the slides, and light shines through the collage material. The scale is drastically altered. The texture is amplified. All the little crevices of the laser print become magnified. The color and surface is transformed by the forces of light and scale.



When the slides are enlarged via projection, things appear that were not visible before. The collages radically transform due to the addition of light and the scale change.





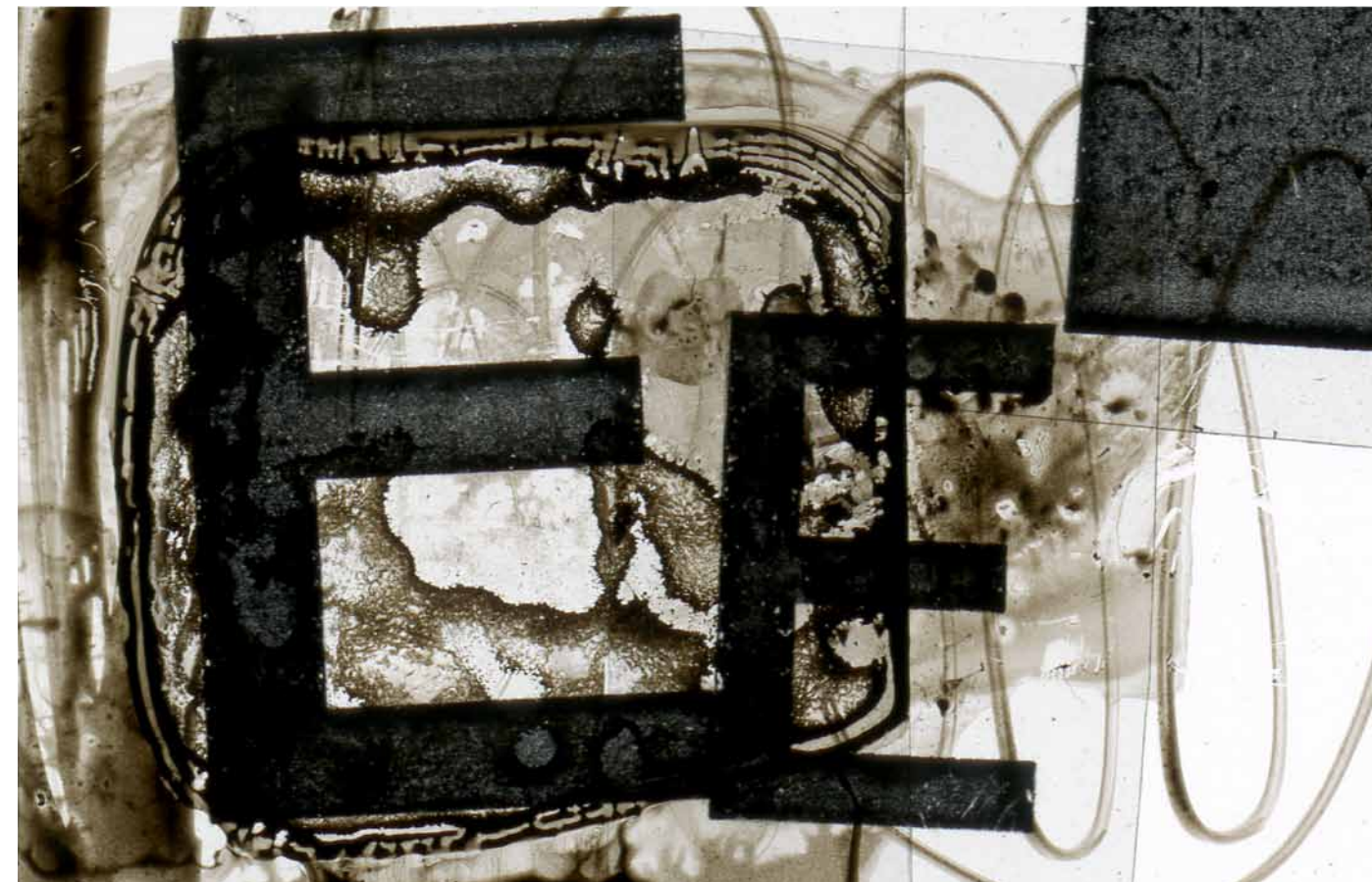
Light forces the collages to transform. At top, the slide is documented with light reflected off of its surface. Compare that with the bottom image, where the slide is documented with light reflected through it. This particular slide is made from laser prints on transparency and matte medium. In the top image, the matte medium is milky and somewhat clear. When it is projected, an alternate personality of the matte medium comes out – it turns yellow-orange. In this way, the projection opens up the matte medium, taking it through a metamorphosis.



While the projection opens up the color of the matte medium, it has the opposite effect on pigments like these purple and green crayons. The slide as an object (top) is very bright and vivid. When the slide is projected (bottom), the color becomes much more subdued and the opaque areas shift to be more transparent. It's this transformation that occurs within a material that I am searching for in these studies.



When select collages are arranged in a group, the word *metamorphosis* unfolds in a very material sense. The letterforms move and change across the series, infusing the word with a tactile quality that enhances understanding, heightening the viewer's perception of metamorphosis.



Above: Miniscule nuggets of dust become very prominent in the projections. Little clumps of things barely visible in the small slides give the compositions a rich texture when they are projected at a large scale.

Opposite: The texture of sumi ink morphs into geologic crystal formations when the collage is enlarged.



I experimented with a range of pigments, from very translucent to very opaque. Watercolor and gouache have different effects when their details are amplified.

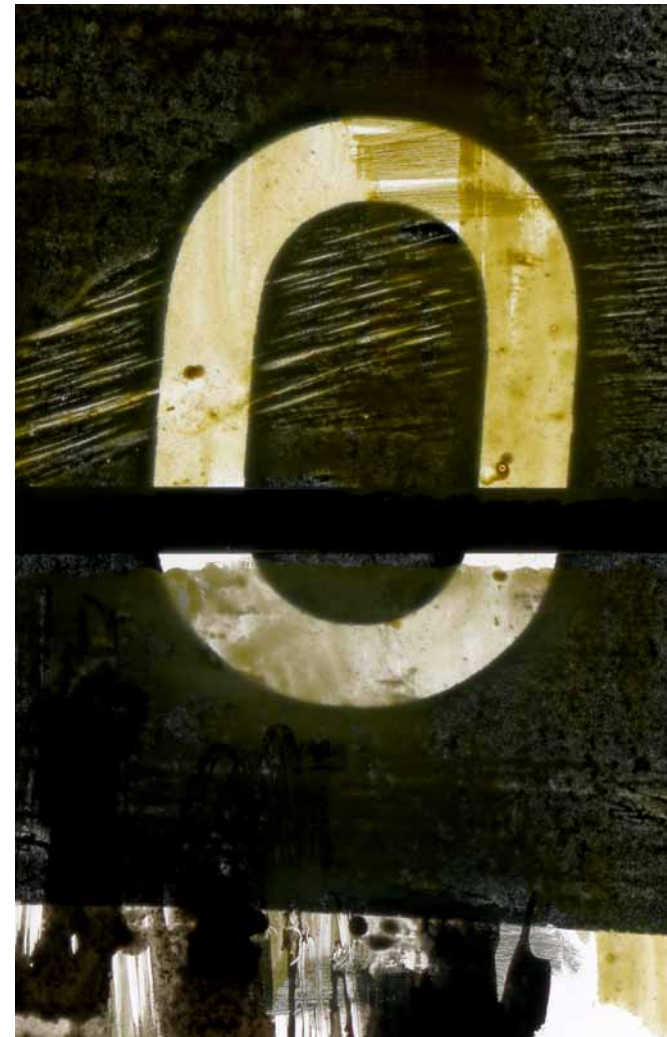
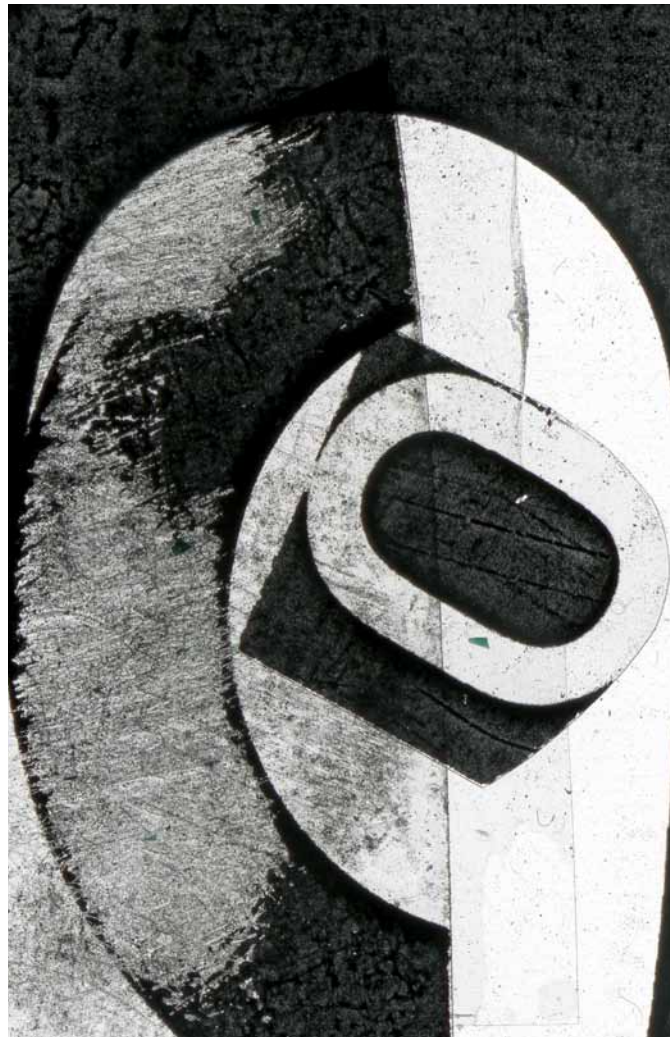


Stripes appear in the laser print surrounding the *P*. The toner becomes rain, all of the little dust dots creating resisted areas, droplets that have the visual effect of washing away the letterform.



A flat collage creates an illusion of an underwater environment, tricking us into imagining we are looking at a drop of pond water through a microscope. Matte medium and thread create the psychological illusion of water and algae.

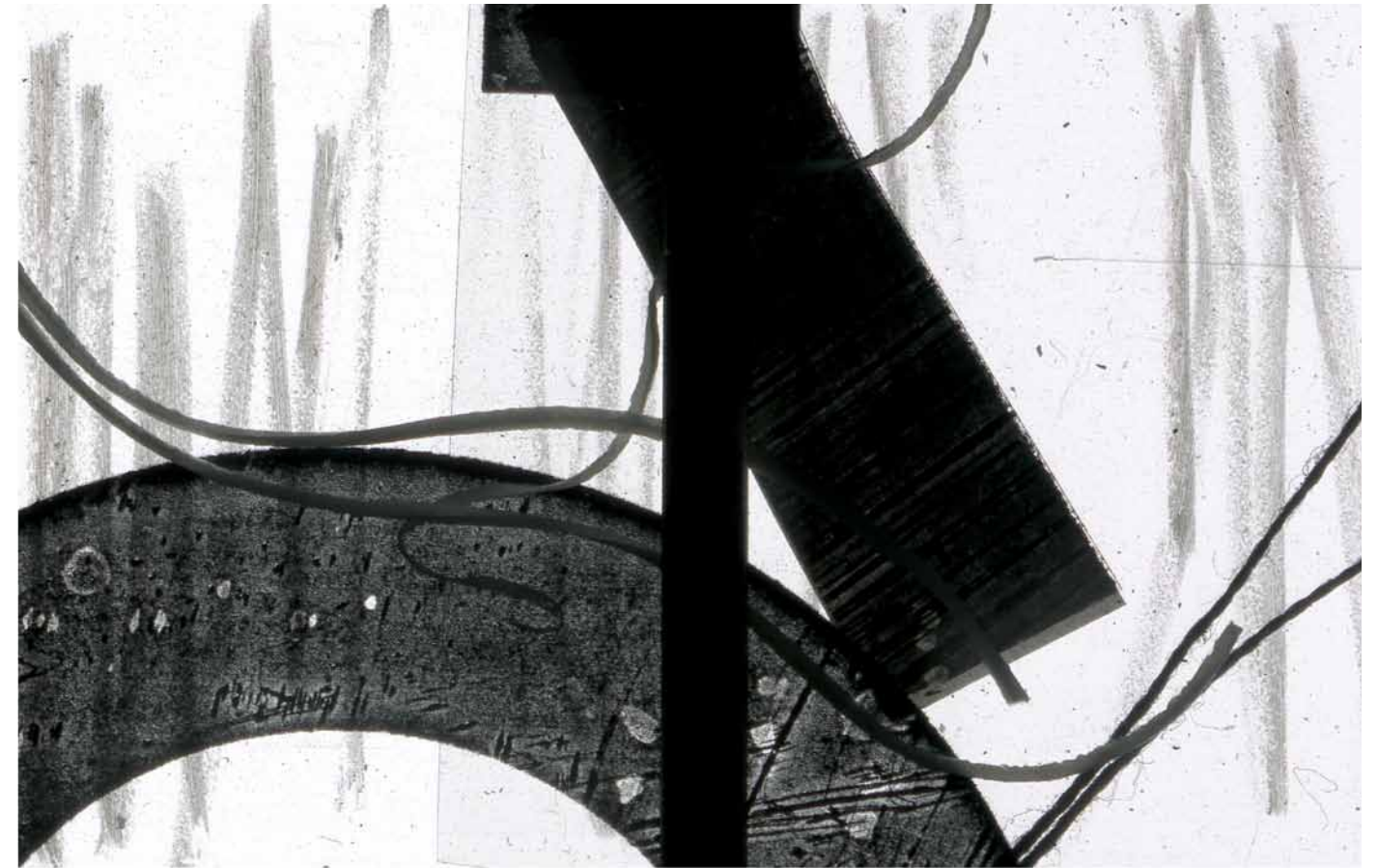
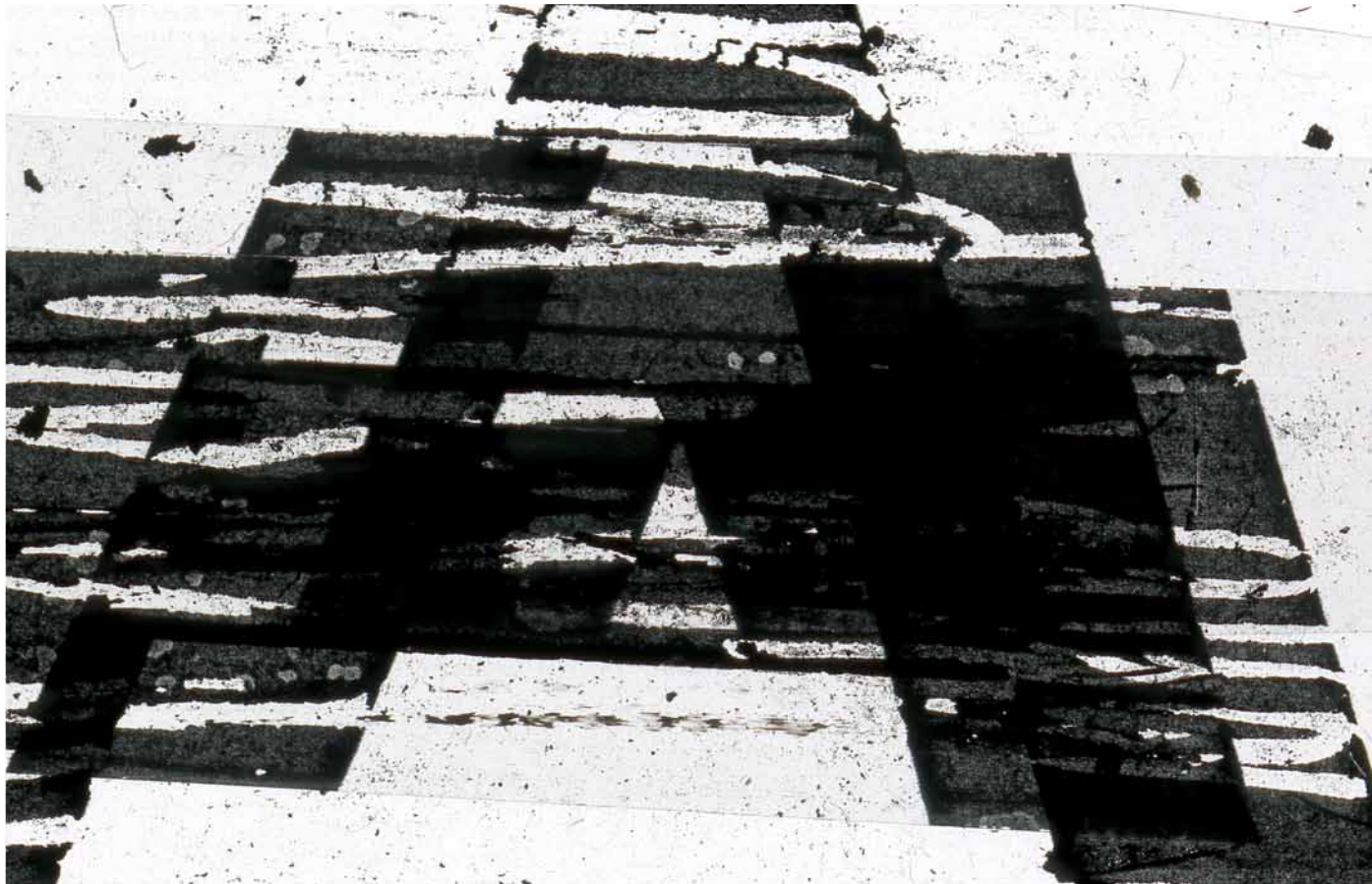
A series of Os dancing across three separate slides. On the far right, some of the laser toner was scraped off with a toothpick to reveal the clear transparency underneath. On this page, sandpaper lends a different texture.



The laser print has a unique quality when light shines through it. In reflected light, it looks very black, but in fact it's hiding its rich texture and uneven density. When light is projected through the laser print, the mottled pattern of the laser printer emerges, and imperfections are brought out. Oily spots where the transparency has been soiled cause the toner to react unevenly.



There is matte medium in the collage above (notice the bubbles on the right side of the image). In this case, I allowed the matte medium to dry before documenting the slide. The yellow-orange color is gone, a drastic transformation from the example on page 130, where the matte medium was still wet when I documented the slide. In this way, the slide collages record an element of time, a clear visual change that occurs over an extended period - another metamorphosis.





The series of slide collages was exhibited at Virginia Commonwealth University in May 2012. High resolution scans of each slide were printed on 13 x 19-inch sheets of Rives BFK printmaking paper. I left the deckled edge of the pages intact, so the prints feel more like tangible objects than digital reproductions. The original slide collages were presented in a grid mapping the formation of the prints, enabling the viewer to understand the relationship between the two and clearly see the transformation from slide to enlargement.

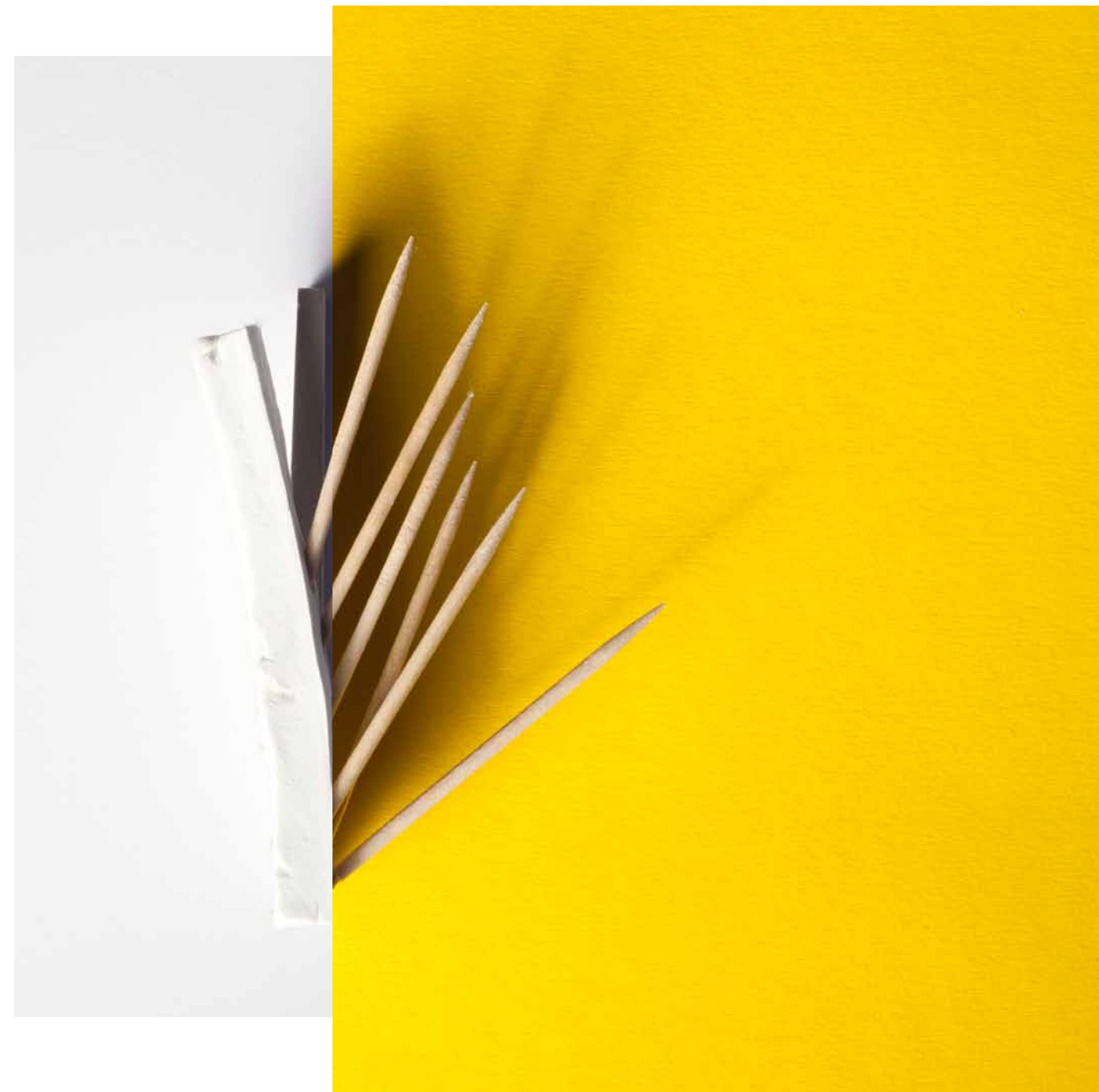
MOLDED CLAY

The next group of studies are created from molded clay. Unfortunately, these studies did not turn out as well as I hoped – they don't experience as much of a transformation as say, the small slide collage before and after it is projected, or the ink as it changes from a bead to being flattened and absorbed into paper. These images are useful as examples of failures as compared to my other, more successful, studies.



Overall the molded clay falls flat. It's too obvious what it is and how it was made, which is distracting. It's difficult to look past the clay-ness of the image. There are occasional interesting moments, for example when the *T* at the bottom left curls up from the surface behind it, the light brings out a contrast between smooth areas and my fingerprints.





Above: Clay has the ability to hold other objects in place, such as toothpicks. Once the clay dries, I can turn the letterform over and stand it up on the toothpicks, using the structure to create a shadow. This idea would be better executed with something else besides toothpicks – a group of smooth metal or clear plastic rods, for example. Toothpicks are too recognizable.

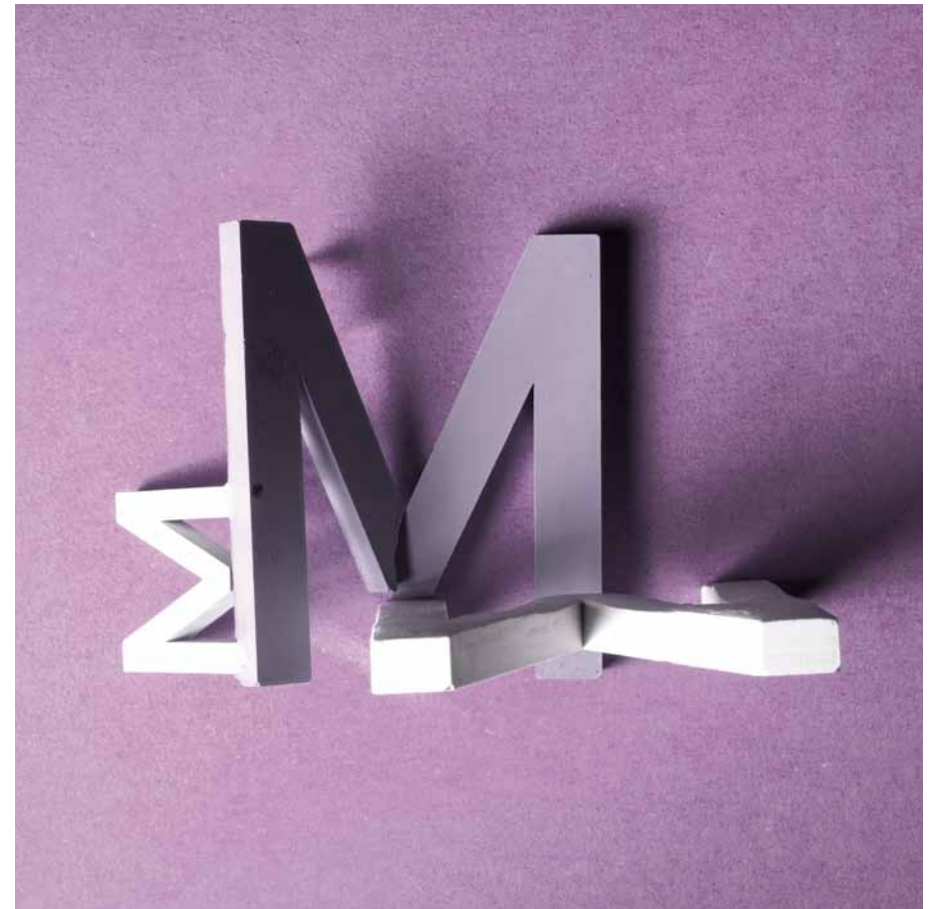
Opposite: The letter *I* breaks out of itself, like a porcupine shedding its quills. This image starts to bring the feeling of metamorphosis into the clay letter, but the toothpicks still carry too many distracting connotations.

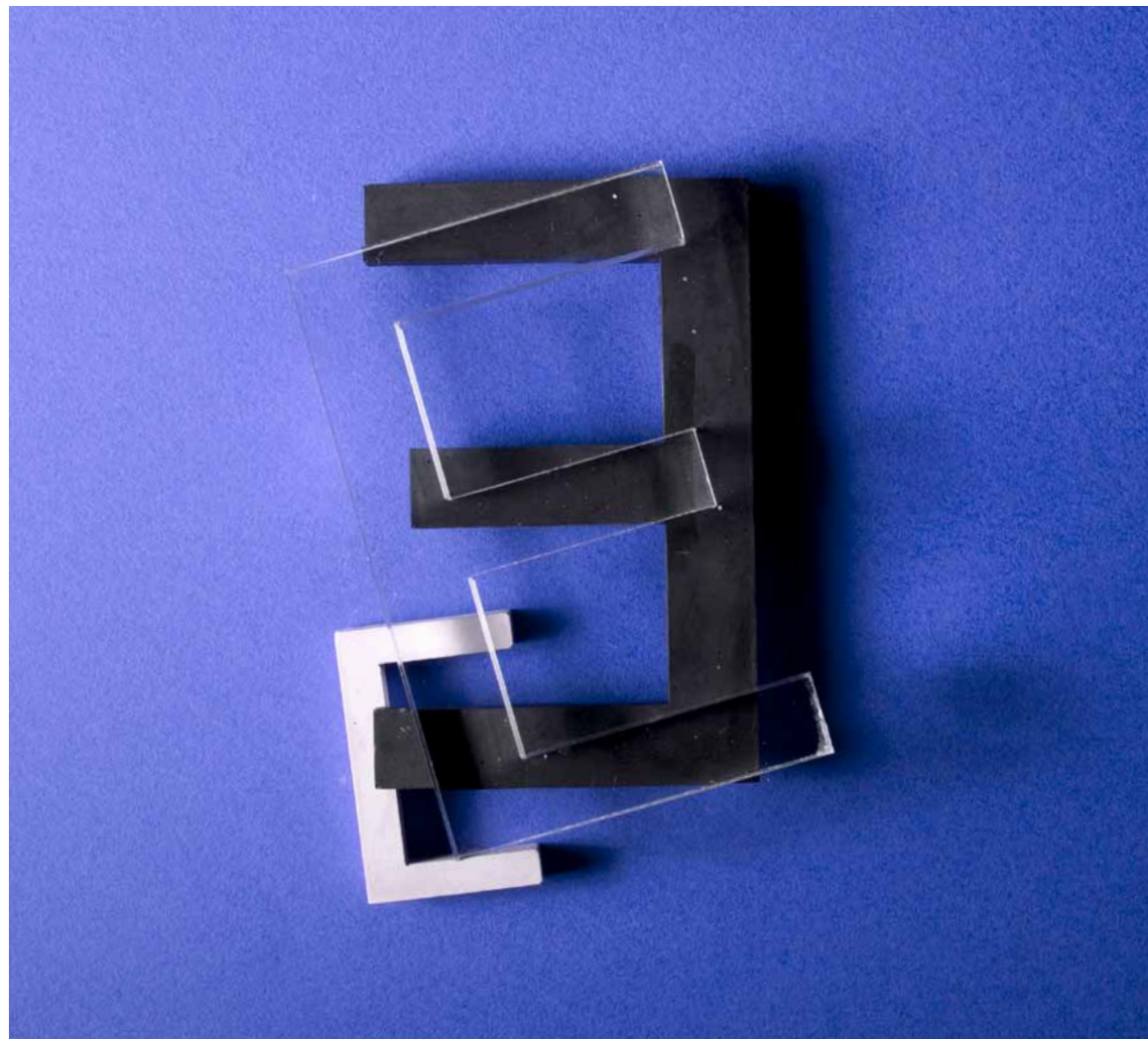
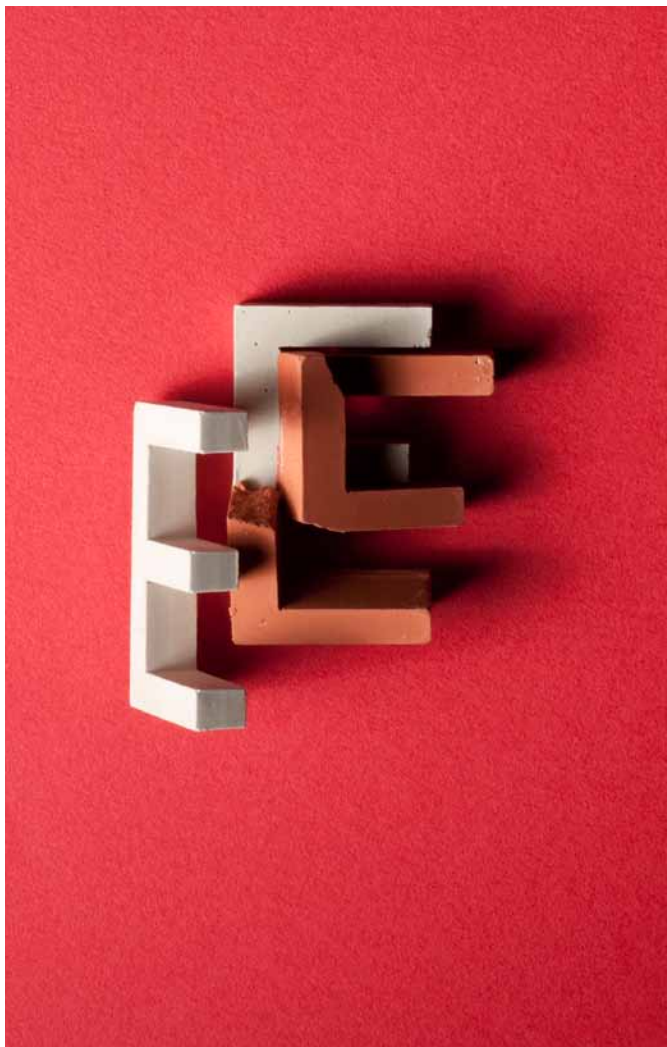
CONCRETE CONSTRUCTIONS

The final group of studies in *Metamorphosis* is a series of concrete constructions. I explored my molds and concrete some more, building on an idea that began in *Holden Caulfield Folio* (*Catch*, page 48). This time, I am incorporating color via concrete dye and merging multiple letters together. The multiplied letterforms become structural forms that can stand up on their own. They roll and rock on the table. They take on more life and energy than the individual, flatter, letters.



Opposite: When I photographed the constructions, I was able to manipulate the lighting to use the dimension of the concrete to create shadows. At top, an *M* growing more *Ms* out of itself. At bottom, the *M* is starting to stir, as if it is about to fold into itself.



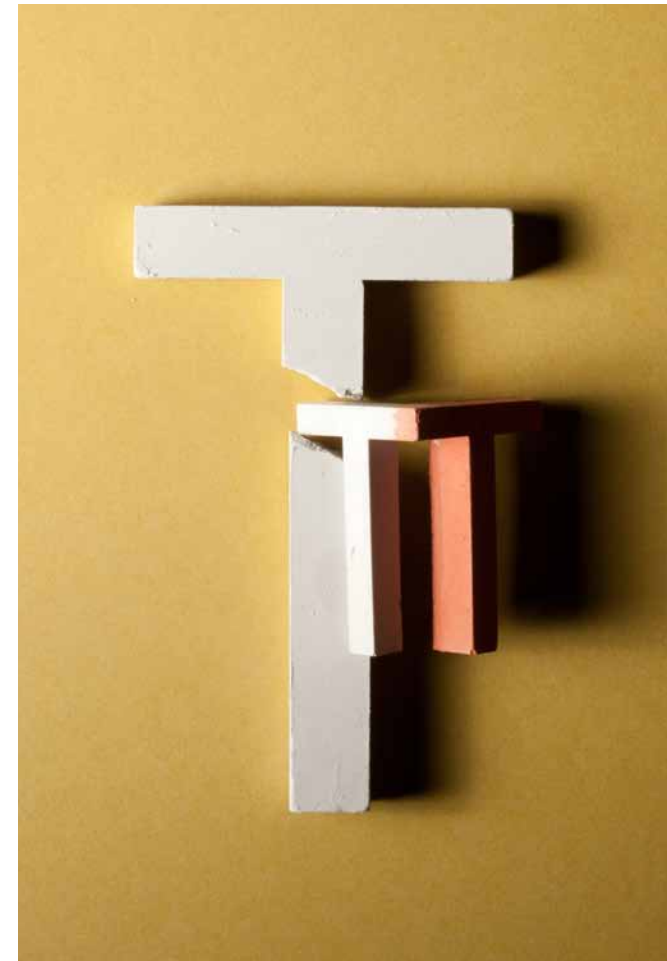
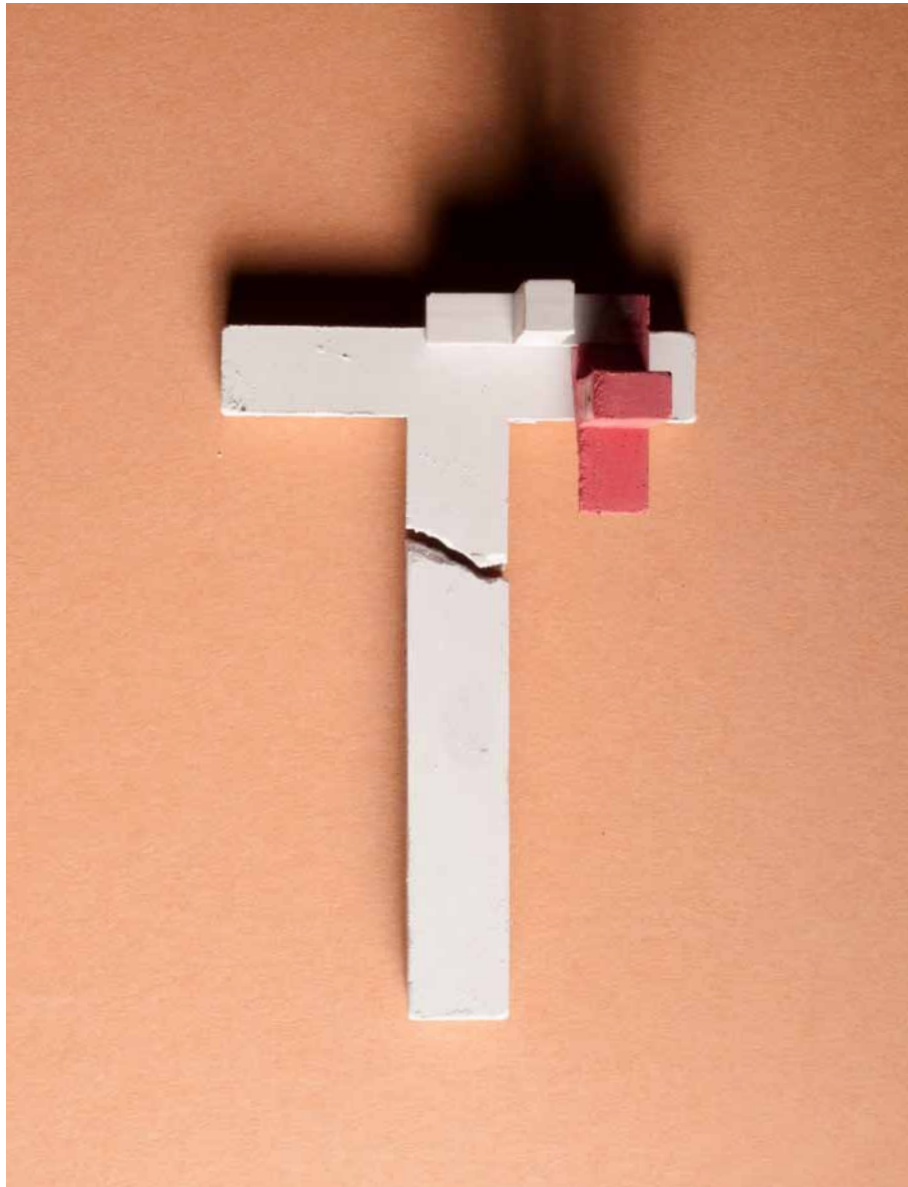


Opposite: An *E* separates and breaks out of itself, multiplying over the course of a few photographs as if it is undergoing a cellular division.

Above: Incorporating acrylic letterforms with concrete casts. The contrast of the clear edges plays off the concrete forms in an interesting way, and creates a slight distortion.

The concrete letters are very fragile and break easily. A break in concrete communicates something much different than a tear in a piece of paper, which we are used to seeing. The break is more violent, requires more force, and leaves a dusty residue behind. A break has much more conviction than a tear.

Opposite: The broken pieces allow me to rotate a letterform around itself. This *T* is breaking out of its shell, turning into something else. The effect is emphasized by the small *T*s growing out of the break, in combination with the rotation action.





A clear acrylic A is raises the concrete structure up away from the background, allowing the shadow to appear. Acrylic and concrete are working together.



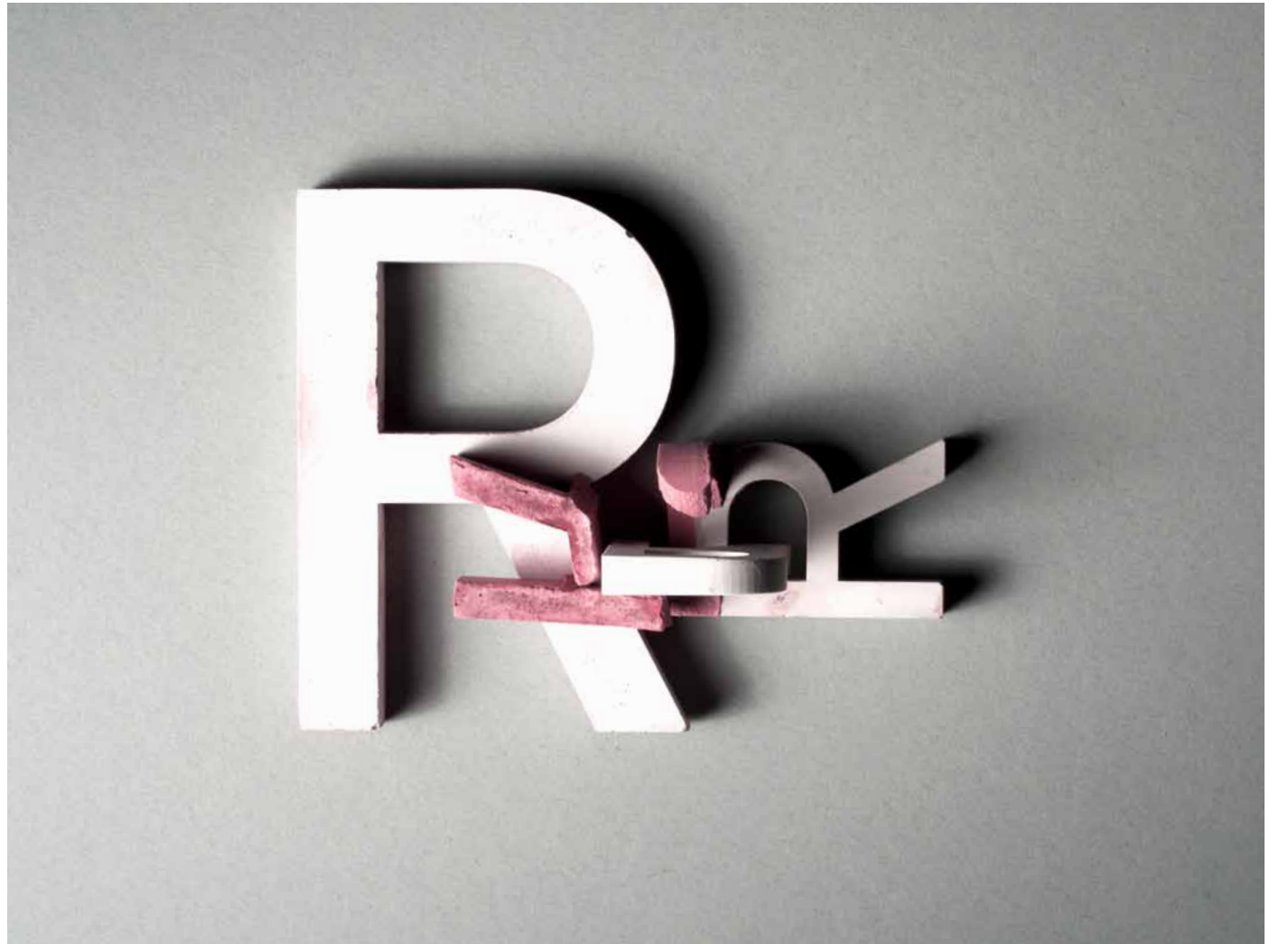
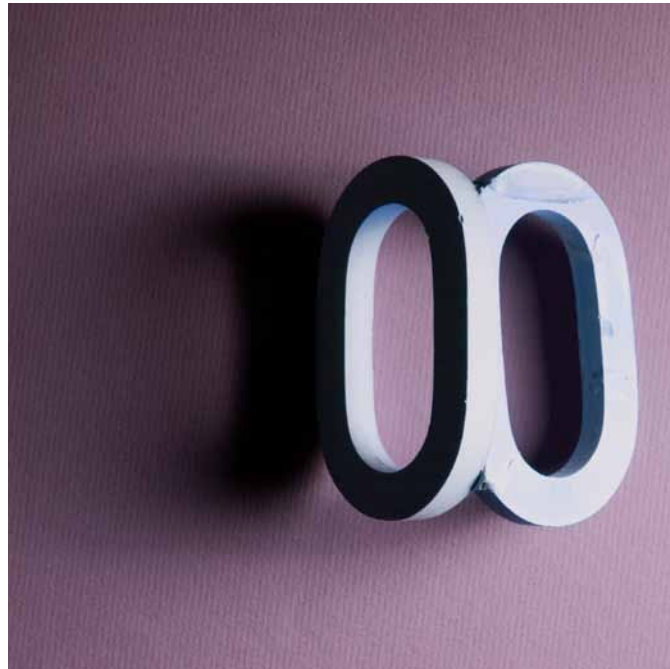
As photographer, I am in control of how strong or weak the shadows are. Above, the concrete A is much more prominent than the A we see in the shadow (in contrast to the *M* on the following page).

Below, I combined multiple pieces together to create the effect of movement and growth. This is a concrete interpretation of the earlier paper *O*s (page 103) that layer up on each other, similar to flower petals.



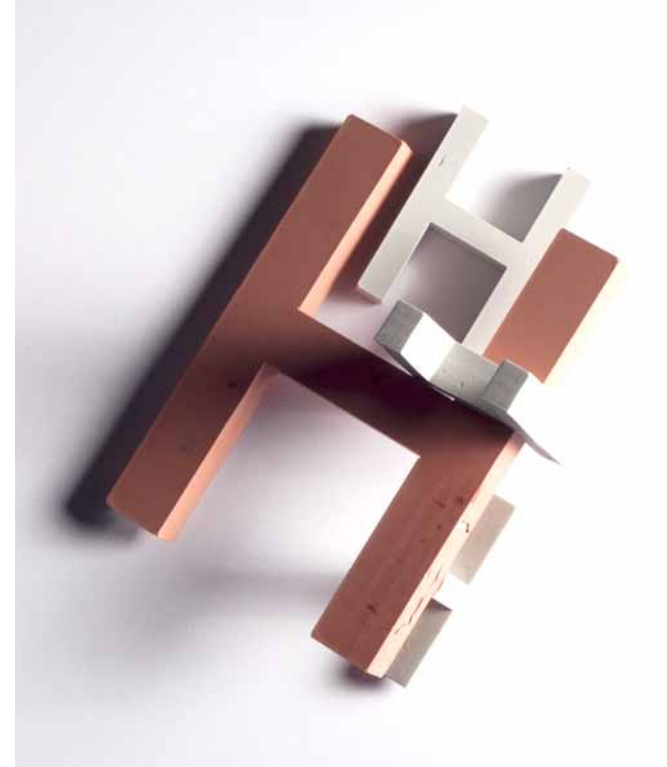
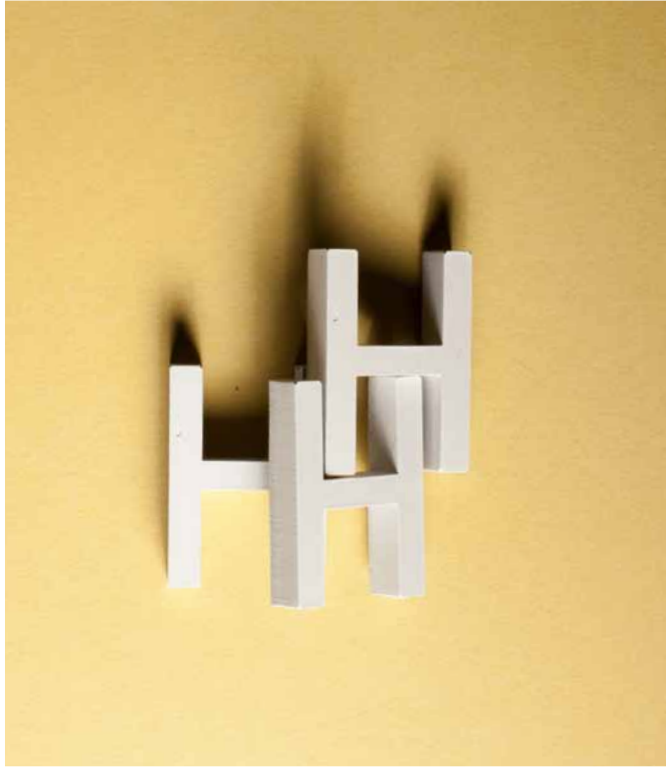
Opposite: The shadow is much more prominent than the concrete. The legibility of the *M* depends completely on the shadow, and the concrete remains abstract.

Above: The vertex of the *M* is such a strong, recognizable form that it can be reduced without compromising legibility.



Above: Os growing out of each other and flipping over in space. Two concrete letterforms are grafted, and expand into three forms when light is applied. They give birth, multiply, into a third letterform.

Opposite: These Rs feel like remnants, rubble to me. At top, two Rs that were once connected perpendicularly have broken, and now have the effect of being unfolded onto a flat surface, like a book that has been opened or a snake shedding its skin.



The form of the *H* lends itself to being modular, so I was able to build *Hs* together to create very structural pieces. The *Hs* support each other and climb out of the page. They beg to rest on one another's beams.

Far right: An example of digital color adjustment (the blue area used to be red). Even though I am adjusting the color, because the material started of as a certain tone of red, I am limited in how far I can push it before it becomes too digitized. I am making decisions and applying changes to the image, but it's still very much controlled by the original color of material.

A broken / in three stages as it turns over and twirls, falling off of the additional / underneath of it that is raising it up from the page. This image creates a sound in my mind, of rocks thundering down a cliff or a building crumbling.





Opposite: Mixing dyed and natural concrete, and layering the pieces on top of each other in a certain alignment, generates the illusion of small *Is* growing out of a big *I*.

This page: At top, the shadow of a concrete *S* is altered by the addition or subtraction of an acrylic letterform. At bottom, an *S* has been torn apart and flattened, and lies in rest after undergoing a metamorphosis.

3

A FUTURE STAGE OF METAMORPHOSIS

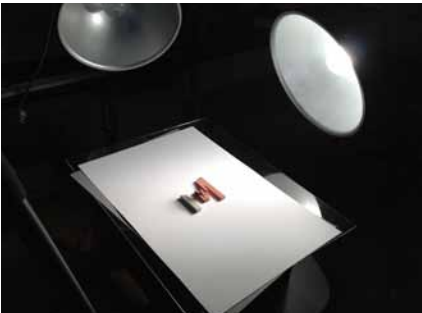
The objects I make are tools to create images. I don’t really care about the actual pieces themselves. In fact, in real life, they look pretty messy and rather uninteresting. They are not precious to me, they are simply a means to another end. What I really care about is how the objects can be represented in images, what happens to them when I take a photograph. It’s the photograph that really leads to the transformation of form. It’s the photograph that lets me capture the shadows that the paper and concrete constructions create. It’s the photograph that lets me open up and overcome the limits of the materials.

Walter Benjamin writes about how photography reveals the *optical unconscious*. The images presented in this document are examples of the quality that photography has to capture things that exist, but are fleeting or invisible to us. There is a hidden world of light and moments that we can’t hold on to without the tool of photography. The camera allows us to extend our eye, stretch out or compress time, change or translate reality.

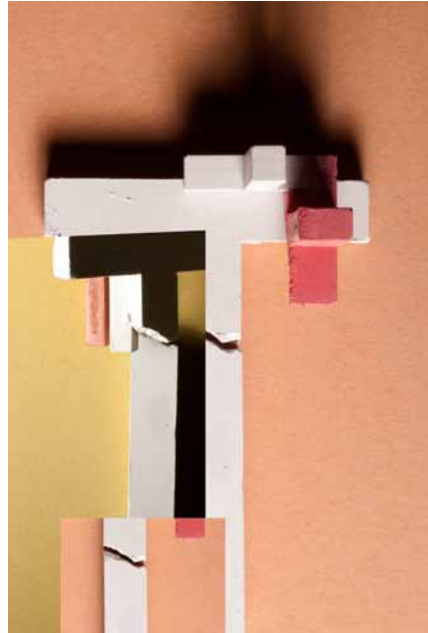
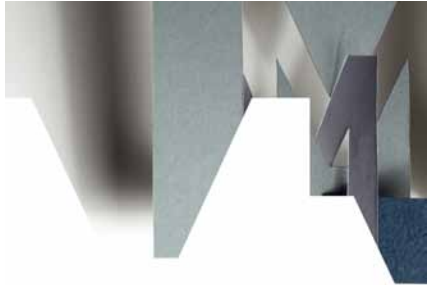
The photograph bridges the gap between the real thing and the digital environment, providing a way for a paper construction or concrete sculpture to enter the digital workspace. The photograph is the vehicle – the train, the car – that transports a material between the world we can touch and feel and the digital world. Photography can travel in both directions – arriving to and departing from the computer. It’s a very important mode of transportation for my work. I don’t know what I would do without a camera.

I was able to explore ways of digitally manipulating photographs in *Holden Caulfield Folio*, but ran out of time to work with the images from *Metamorphosis* to the extent that I wanted to before this book had to be completed. This unfinished feeling provides me with a future direction for *Metamorphosis* – the studies hold potential for another layer or stage of design. I wonder how I can manipulate the photographs further, in new and different ways from *Holden Caulfield Folio*. Cropping the images, adding some digital form, changing the color and opacity is a starting point.

The following pages show some sketches of what *Metamorphosis* could become. These compositions could evolve into posters, book spreads, storyboards for a motion piece, or many other directions. Performed or arranged in sequence, the layouts would show my studies building upon each other, allowing the viewer to read *metamorphosis* and experience the illusion of materials shifting within and across the letterforms.



Photography transforms small, fragile objects into strong graphic images that can be digitally adjusted and reproduced.



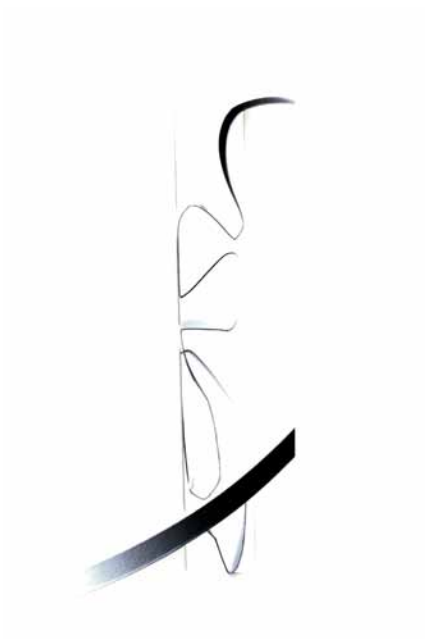
These sketches are missing a layer of detail. Perhaps they would benefit from the addition of elements with a linear quality, to contrast the images. I have dynamic planes, but am missing point and line.





Color too, has the potential to bring the idea of metamorphosis to life. Perhaps there is a transition of color over a series of plates, or maybe a shift from black and white to color. The sketches shown here divide the word *metamorphosis* by individual letters, but they could be designed as syllables, too.





This page: The peeling S on the far right benefits from the addition of a linear element – a hint of structure is uncovered by drawing a simple line along its tummy. I am undecided about how far I should adjust the images. Both S compositions on this page, for example, are very close to their original source materials and maintain the natural colors of paper and ink. The I in the middle, on the other hand, has been pushed very far away from its original material. Perhaps showing a range speaks most to the concept of metamorphosis, by demonstrating that digital tools can open up and overcome the limits of materials, covering a sliding scale between explicit and abstract.



EVALUATION

It is fitting to conclude my graduate experience with a meditation on the word *metamorphosis* — over the past two years I have experienced a transformation. My perspective of my own work, and my expectations of that work, have changed. I came to graduate school expecting to leave with a tidy, finished body of work, and instead I am leaving with a collection of unfinished studies that lead to more questions than answers. I am filled with the hopeful sensation of being at the very beginning of my career and propelling toward the many discoveries ahead of me. This document is a foundation, the departure point for the next phase of my research.

The visual work presented in this document is successful in that it demonstrates some key points I addressed in my writing. Clearly, materials and processes have the potential to form and inform visual communication, and this illustrates the importance and relevance of analog and digital synthesis in graphic design. Over the course of these studies, I have demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of materials, by forming an intimate relationship with materials and applying them to visual communication in a variety of ways. My work is evidence that materials provide a vast vocabulary, which exceeds that found in contemporary software. The computer is one tool for expression, and there are millions more. Without a doubt, synthesizing analog and digital methods significantly increases our capacity to communicate by extending our visual language.

The work presented in this document also falls short in several ways. It is a dip of the toe into my subject — addressing a few ideas in an ocean of possibilities. There are many directions that I did not have time to explore, and ideas I had to file away with intentions of revisiting later. I did not exhaust the potential of any one material or concept. Overall, these studies are personal — a next step may be to see how I can apply this way of working to projects that involve other people, such as client commissions or collaborative efforts. Perhaps my work favors the analog. I may benefit from a commitment to learn more about ancillary digital technologies, such as programming and motion graphics. As of now, my synthesis of analog and digital is narrow, and I could expand this study with a broader and deeper knowledge of technology, allowing me to explore how a wider variety of technologies synthesize with non-digital materials and tools.

The past two years at graduate school have been a period of reflection. I identified a need to work with physical materials, to be engaged with my process in a very tactile sense. I learned that the more I know about something, the less it feels like I know, and to stop being uncomfortable with this feeling. As time passes, I see my work more and more as a portal, as an entry point, but without a clear ending point.

I am thankful for the opportunity to teach, which was both deeply satisfying and utterly terrifying. It has forced me to address (and mostly conquer) my fear of public speaking. I came to value the unique perspective I have to offer my students, and look forward to spending more time in the classroom in the future.

Most of all, I am leaving graduate school with strong momentum for future work, full of ideas and questions. I plan on researching the intersection of typography and crafts (especially ceramics, textiles, and jewelry). I am interested in the interdisciplinary use of materials, the way that modern methods of typography and fabrication are being integrated with centuries-old techniques, and how the presence of typographic communication affects our relationship with and understanding of everyday objects.

I look forward to exploring the intersections between graphic design, ceramics, and textiles and merging the disciplines in my work. I wonder what the frontier of graphic design looks like and feels like, with so many tools and technologies available to synthesize. I will continue looking to both the past and the future, exploring how new and old ways of working influence each other to create fresh hybrid forms, and investigating the potential for meaning in materials.

This book, like my studies, possesses a tension between being refined and unrefined. Many images included here are incomplete, holding the potential to become ‘finished’ pieces of design – but it is the act of leaving things unfinished that keeps them alive and provides an impetus to keep working.

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Abrams, Janet. “Craft: A Return to the Hand.” *Metropolis Magazine*. April 2011.

Reading the author’s description of how she dipped her “hand in a bucket of clay slip and was totally seduced” was like looking into a mirror. I, too, eagerly await the arrival of craft class catalogs, and the sense of inspiration they bring.

Aicher, Otl. *Analogous and Digital*. Berlin: Ernst & Sohn, 1994.

“Grasping with the Hand and the Mind” was my favorite essay during graduate school. Aicher’s view of “the hand’s plasticity” as “the plasticity of thought” especially resonated with me. He reminds me that if my mind is stuck, I simply need to put my hands in motion and ideas will follow.

Art21: Art in the Twenty-First Century. Public Broadcasting Service, 2001.

This television series has been my not-so-guilty pleasure when I need a break. The “Identity” episode featured Louise Bourgeois and her quote, “I am not what I am. I am what I make with my hands.” I am trying to live by this.

Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 2007.

“The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” was my first reading assignment in graduate school, and it set the tone for my two years of study. Benjamin’s idea that photography reveals the *optical unconscious*, and the discussion about the value of aura in original works of art and lack of aura in reproductions, are particularly relevant to my interests.

Bringhurst, Robert. *The Solid Form of Language*. Kentville: Gaspereau Press, 2004.

Considering writing as the “solid form of language, the precipitate” emphasizes my view of type as a natural element, something that physically evolves and holds information within it, much like DNA or dinosaur bones. Type is organic and malleable.

Hara, Kenya. *Designing Design*. Baden: Lars Müller Publishers, 2007.

Section two, “Haptic: Awakening the Senses” first attracted me to this book. I am especially charmed by Hara’s description of materials as “memories awakened by stimulation. Designing highlights subtle differences between recalled memories and reality.” This statement underscores the idea that materials have psychological effects.

“Pacific Standard Time: Anthony Kiedis Celebrates Ed Ruscha.” *YouTube*. 2011.

Ed Ruscha is one of my favorite artists, and I enjoyed seeing him speak about his own work in this video. I am intrigued by his attitude of “not knowing too much about what you’re doing.” He says sometimes he doesn’t know if he is “painting pictures of words, or painting pictures with words.”

Schouwenberg, Louise. *Hella Jongerius: Misfit*. New York: Phaidon Press, 2010.

Hella Jongerius is at the top of my list of design crushes. I look up to her for the way she combines craft and design, bringing human qualities of sensuality and playfulness to mass-produced industrial objects. Alice Rawsthorn’s essay “The Human Factor” elaborates on this discussion. The experiments in *Chicle Project* reveal Jongerius’ intuitive process of working with materials.

Skolos, Nancy and Thomas Wedell. *Type Image Message*. Gloucester: Rockport Publishers, 2006.

“Inversion” in which type and image fuse by exchanging roles, is my favorite section of this book. Skolos and Wedell are a constant source of inspiration, and I credit them with introducing me to the pleasure of working backwards, from form to content. Also see skolos-wedell.com.

Solt, Mary Ellen and Willis Barnstone. *Concrete Poetry: a World View*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969.

“The visual poem as a functional design can humanize the materials and techniques of the mass media of communication, can make them available to the human spirit.” This sentence is a fundamental seed for my research. This book includes a wide selection of work demonstrating how words and form reinforce each other.

Venezky, Martin. *It Is Beautiful — Then Gone*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005.

The chapters “Thoughts on the Classroom” and “Experiments and Studies” are relevant to my discussion about the value of process. I admire how Venezky’s work demonstrates that “the practice of design can still be hands-on and physical, no matter what new technologies may be placed at one’s disposal.” This attitude resonated with me as an undergraduate student and has since become an essential part of how I work.

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951.

Reading this book again after fourteen years was personally revealing. The last time I read it, I was an adolescent, and I thought Holden was ‘cool’ because he didn’t listen to his parents and used the f-word. This time, I felt sorry for him and wanted to take care of him, to tell him everything is going to be okay. The book didn’t change, but I did – I became an adult.

Bloom, Harold. *J.D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye*. New York: Bloom’s Literary Criticism, 2009.

Bryfonski, Dedria. *Depression in J.D. Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye*. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2009.

Salzberg, Joel. *Critical Essays on Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990.

Salzman, Jack. *New Essays on The Catcher in the Rye*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

These collections of critical essays and reviews of *The Catcher in the Rye* enhanced my understanding of the text, and provided a range of interpretations to compare and contrast with my own.

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